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Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, $1.50. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

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PRINTED IN THE U. S. A. Vol. 44, No. 4

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(*Continued on page 95*)

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The Lamia in the Penthouse

By Thorp McClusky

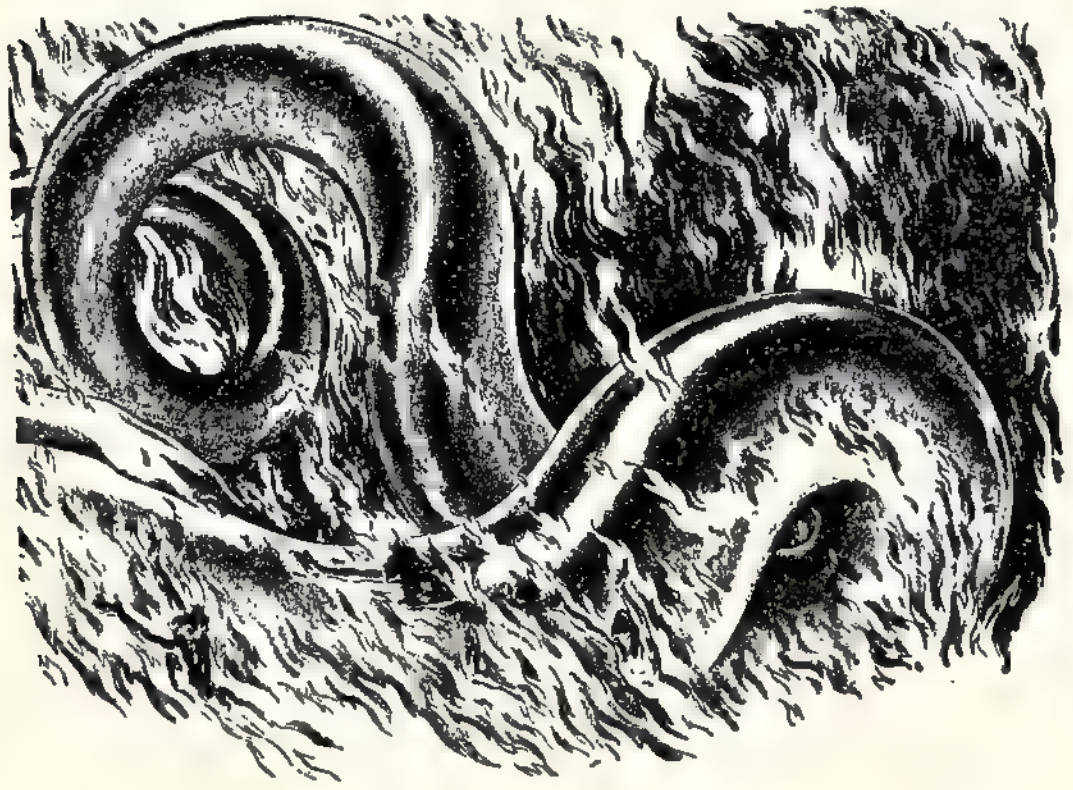
IT IS 11:00 o'clock in the morning, and the sunlight is streaming in brightly through my study window. Everything seems perfectly normal; the neat rows of books on the shelves, the ormolu clock ticking away serenely on the mantelpiece, the pile of yellow paper to the left of my typewriter, half a dozen uncompleted manuscripts and odds and ends of research stacked up on my right, and the smoking things comprising a small disorder at the extreme left, by the telephone.

Yet two things are not "as usual." My wife Ruth, who seldom travels, is out in Colorado visiting her sister Ellen and family; the apartment seems lifeless without her. And there's a manuscript I didn't write in the center drawer of my desk—a manuscript of strange fascination and horror. A manuscript that will never be published because it wouldn't be believed, even as fiction, and, more important, because decency forbids.

I am writing this, not for publication, but merely to ease my tautened nerves and organize my chaotic thoughts. I feel that if I didn't, I would really go mad.

It seems hard to believe that, for almost thirty hours, I have been first in a police station and later in a mental-patients ward at Bellevue Hospital, that I'm probably loaded with a sedative of some sort, and

. . . one guy in a million; he had a love affair with a female demon.



Heading by Virgil Finlay

that I've only been back here for two hours.

It seems hard to believe that, only three days ago, I was grinding along peacefully in my little rut, blissfully ignorant of the hell that was brewing. It seems a thousand years ago.

At about 4:00 on Monday afternoon—this is Thursday morning—my telephone rang. "Hi, Mac," announced a well-remembered voice, "this is Jack Winters. Remember me? I'm up in Grand Central Station; just got off the streamliner."

"Get down here, you old peavey-pusher!" I yelped gleefully. "If I'd known you were coming, I'd of baked a cake!"

Jack, of course, was one of my greatest friends. Funny, actually, how few close friends any of us have; if it takes the fingers of more than one hand to count them, we are unusually blessed.

I'd met Jack in an odd way. Four-five years ago, I was up on the Coeur d'Alene River in northern Idaho, doing a lumber-camp story. I was pretty well pooped when I arrived, and they assigned me to No. 9 bunkhouse—one of the modern ones—to stow away my gear and get a little rest. It was mid-afternoon; I was the only person in the snug little cabin.

I got my stuff disposed of and was starting to take off my clothes when I saw a portable typewriter on a little table in a corner. Beside it was one of those cardboard boxes that holds a ream of paper.

Well, I am a snoop both by nature and by trade. I opened the box and found inside it two or three extremely cordial letters from editors of well-known "slick" magazines, addressed to Mr. Jack Winters, this address, plus quite a lot of blank paper and

the rough draft of a gripping and fast-moving lumber-camp story.

Today, most everybody has heard of Jack Winters. His stories of lumbering, hunting, and farming in the Northwest are invariably gems, though he hasn't written many. Then, he was practically unknown; I, for one, had never heard of him.

Well, I thought he'd hint around that he was writing, but he didn't. Somehow I admired that. Three, four days went by, and still he kept mum, although he was pleasant and friendly enough. I wanted to open up on him with some comments on that rough draft, but of course I couldn't, because he would have known that I'd snooped. You don't last long in lumber camps after it's known that you have a habit of prying into other people's gear.

Finally I got my chance when another bunkhousemate let the cat out of the bag; Winters froze like a startled elk so I guessed that he'd tipped off the boys to keep their mouths shut about his writing. He was very diffident, actually shy. But the ice was broken, and our friendship grew from there.

Funny thing, I don't think I've seen Jack on more than four or five occasions since, usually when I was out his way on an assignment but once when he came to New York to look around and we put him up for a week. Yet he was as intimate a friend as I ever had, and I think he felt the same way about me.

HE STILL worked in the woods; he was the sort of man who needs vigorous exercise to feel his fittest. Lately he'd bought himself a pretty nice sort of rundown farm which he was fixing up when they weren't logging, and he'd got himself engaged to an eye-stopper who'd drifted in from Minneapolis or someplace and was working around the camps as a waitress. He was just about all set for life.

"How you feel?" he now asked. "How's Ruthie, your better nine-tenths?"

"Fine!" I chortled. "Only I'm sorry about Ruthie, she'd have wanted to see you, but she isn't here. She's out West visiting relations; I'm keeping bachelor hall. Get your stuff into a taxicab and hustle down here; I'm in the mood for company and no work."

Jack laughed, and for the first time I noticed that his voice sounded taut and harsh. Something was wrong; that wasn't like him.

"All right," he said, after a moment. "I'll be right down."

He was knocking on my door in fifteen minutes. He had two big suitcases with him. It looked as though he was going to be in town for awhile; maybe he had a TV contract.

We went into the livingroom and started in on the bourbon. After a little idle chatter that didn't fool either of us Jack said suddenly, "You got any idea of where I can get an inexpensive little apartment? They tell me it's tough finding places to camp in this town."

"Hell," I said, "you can stay here. Ruthie'll be gone another couple of weeks."

He shook his head. "I'm going to be here longer than that. I'm East for good. I never want to see the Coeur d'Alene again as long as I live."

"Well now—" I started, and closed my trap. I fixed a couple more drinks and we went to work on those.

Jack tensed his magnificent shoulders, then let them sag wearily. "I've busted up with Mary," he said. "It's no go. All that lumber country is full of memories of her; you know she worked around a lot. I want to forget her, completely."

The story came out only gradually; Jack is a gentleman. I didn't have it all until after midnight, until after we'd had a leisurely dinner at a hole-in-the-wall French restaurant I know of that doesn't make a fetish of hurrying people out even though they just sit and talk, until after we'd downed litres of sour burgundy and finally got soul-satisfyingly drunk on the last of my bourbon.

It appeared that Mary was a slut. A wanton with the face of an angel and the figure of a succubus. And the guile of a Jezebel. She'd two-timed Jack with a score of men in half-a-dozen lumber camps and with the farmers and the farmers' sons in the little valley where he'd bought the 160 acres.

"I can understand a girl being, well, man-crazy and weak in will-power," Jack said somberly. "I can pity a girl like that

and love her and by God even marry her, knowing in advance how people'll laugh at me behind my back, so long as I think I'm helping in some way to ease the torture that's driving her and know that she cares for me.

"But Mary was different. She doesn't care for man nor beast. She collects men like vicious little boys collect beetles on squares of cardboard, sticking pins through their squirming bodies. When men fall in love with her she laughs, twitches her hips, and leaves them. She's a sadist, through and through; not a physical sadist but a spiritual one, which is worse.

"People tried to warn me, but I didn't believe them. She's so skilfully diabolical. But gradually it sank in, and finally the picture of her true nature grew clear in my mind like, like—I remember reading a story once in which the outline of a decomposing body on the second floor of an uninhabited house gradually appeared on the ceiling below. It was like that, and it was just as terrible a picture.

"I even made the mistake of trying to reason with her, plead with her. She admitted everything, boasted about it, called me a sniveling fool, and laughed at me. God, you should have heard her laugh.

"So I packed those two suitcases and came East. My trunks'll be along soon. I've put the place up for sale. Oh, I suppose I'll go back sometime; it's corny and childish to say that I never will; but not now. Not for a long time.

"Mac," he said, "do you think there are some women who are not women at all, but incarnations of evil that look like women? Like the succubi and lamias, for example? Do you think that's possible?"

"Well," I said, pontificating as well as I could considering the liquid cargo I was carrying, "it could be. Something along the order of poltergeist entities, only a lot more powerful and malign and equipped with sex? Maybe, why not? Science now accepts the reality of poltergeist phenomena, you know. Or didn't you?"

"I didn't," he confessed.

"Oh yes. There was a poltergeist-haunted boy in Washington, D. C. not so long ago; he was plagued unmercifully. When he tried to sit in a chair or sleep in a bed something invisible and malicious dumped him out; scientists from several universities and the Washington Society for Parapsychology investigated. There was a lot of puff in the papers. Dr. Rhine, down at Duke University, commented 'Most interesting'."

"Is he haunted now?" Jack asked.

"Fortunately, no. A Jesuit priest exorcised whatever it was; the priest himself called it a 'demon'. So you can see that there actually are mighty unpleasant and nonmaterial 'devils' on this mundane planet of ours." I held up the bourbon and squinted through it. "Enough for two more drinks. Let's kill it."

JACK thought that over, twirling his glass in his hands. After awhile he laughed harshly and said, "Well, I'm the outstanding guy in a million. I had a love affair with a female demon."

I was just drunk enough to contradict him. "I doubt it," I said. "I think your Mary was just a very vicious, depraved, and cunning woman; you're lucky to be rid of her. If she were a demon she wouldn't be slinging hash in lumber camps."

He grinned wryly at that. "I guess you're right," he admitted. His face was suddenly savage, reckless. "Boy, I'd like to meet up with the real thing! All her deviltry wouldn't be any worse than the hell I've already been through. And she might know lots more about how to make love than Mary did, though I can't guess what."

Our glasses were empty. "All right," I said, "let's forget about Mary and get some sleep. Tomorrow's another day. You bunk on the davenport; I won't disturb you in the morning; you can sleep till noon if you want to. I'll get some blankets and sheets and pillowcases . . ."

I WAS awakened by the sound of my typewriter, rattling away a mile a minute in the study. I rolled over and peered blearily at the alarm-clock; it was twenty minutes of eight and I hadn't planned to get up until nine. Jack must have been hit by a flash of inspiration, I decided.

I got up and stumbled sleepily into the study. Jack looked fresh as a daisy; the big lean hulk of him hunched intently over the

machine, his powerful yet sensitive fingers flying. He looked up and grinned twistedly, and the clatter stopped.

"What's your idea on writing stories in the first person, Mac?" he asked.

"Lousy," I said instantly. "Fellow who has to do that admits lack of craftsmanship or he's trying to give a phony yarn realism it otherwise lacks."

"I'm writing this in the first person," he said.

I WENT over and picked up the sheaf of manuscript that lay face down on the desk. I didn't even bother to look at the page in the machine. There were about twelve pages of double-spaced copy.

"When'd you start this?" I asked.

"Oh, about five o'clock. I couldn't sleep."

I looked at the first page. The title jumped at me: THE LAMIA IN THE PENTHOUSE, by Jack Winters.

"Screwy," I said, and glanced at the first paragraph: *There are creatures of unspeakable evil haunting this earth who have the appearance of women. Yet they are not women, they are malign entities who assume female shape in order to lure to their doom unsuspecting men upon whose souls they feed. They are the snake-women of age-old legend—the lamias.*

My name is Jack Winters. I am a woodsman by occupation, a lumberjack. For amusement and pleasure and sometimes to tell people things I think they should know, I write short stories. You may have heard of me.

But this is a different story from any I have written before. This is a true story.

"It stinks," I said, "It takes a special knack to write this sort of thing, and you haven't got it. You don't expect to sell this tripe, do you?"

"I may not even try to sell it," he said quietly. "I'm all tensed up and this story just jumped into my head, complete, in the middle of the night. I've got to get it out of my system."

"Get Mary out of your system, you mean," I said shrewdly. "Spiritual purgative. Bust the boil of hurt and resentment you feel toward Mary by creating a much more evil female creature and then triumphing over her—or it. Good idea. Hop to it."

"I'm not going to triumph in the story," he said grimly. "The lamia is."

"Oh, hell," I said. "No happy ending?"

"No."

"Umm." I read a little further. *Though I had never been in love, I had often written about it. Then I, too, succumbed to the chemistry of romance. That was more than a year ago.*

But she was as evil as flesh and blood could be. She was a wanton with the face of an angel and the figure of a succubus. And the guile of a Jezebel. Her name was Mary.

"Brother, you're laying yourself wide open to a libel suit on this yarn," I snapped. "Mary'll be hopping mad . . ."

"Mary'll never read it," he said stonily.

"You sure have got angels versus succubi on the brain. You used the same phrases last night."

. . . I came to New York to try to forget my heartbreak. I thought a change of scenery would do me good, help me forget. I looked up an old friend, another writer, a fellow named Thorp McClusky. You may have read his stuff, too, from time to time.

"My sainted Aunt Sarah!" I yipped. "You've got me in here. I don't like this at all."

"All right," he said, "calm yourself. I told you I was not writing this for publication, but to get it out of my system. Anyway, you said it stinks. But if it's good enough, and I decide to publish it, do you think I'd let those names stand? Don't be an idiot; they'd be changed."

His wife was away, out West someplace visiting her relatives. He invited me to stay at his apartment, and I accepted gladly. I didn't know how long I was going to stay in New York, or where I might go from there, but I had one terrible desire—to meet a woman more evil than Mary, to make her fall madly in love with me, and then to spurn and humiliate her as Mary had spurned and humiliated me.

I didn't care how evil she was; if she had been a demoness straight from Hell I would have welcomed her challenge. In fact, I felt cheated that lamias and succubi don't exist.

I put the manuscript down. I knew the ending already. "Hell," I said, "if you're

set on meeting some Lucrezia Borgias, Messalinas, and suchlike around here, I'm afraid we can't oblige you. I haven't met a truly evil woman all the time I've been in New York, or anywhere else, for that matter."

"I'll find one," he said smugly. "That's part of the story."

"Okay," I said, "now look. You got your typewriter with you?"

"In the tan suitcase."

"Well, you don't have to bother to get it out today unless you prefer it to this one. I've got to meet an editor at 11:00, I've a luncheon date, and I'll be interviewing a guy all afternoon. So you just stay right here and get that story out of your system. Tomorrow, you can set up shop in the living room, or you can do whatever you damn please. I'm going to shower and shave now. How about breakfast in a little while?"

He nodded. As I walked out of the study, the furious clacking resumed.

THIS part I have to guess at. Not really guess—I know; I've read Jack's manuscript. I can see him sitting there at my desk as the hours flew by, utterly engrossed, pouring out a distillate of the evil in women (some women, of course, and some men too; he made it clear that the race is basically good) and building up, page after page, a madder and madder frustration.

He couldn't find a woman evil enough. They were all so obvious to him, so transparent in their motives, so *limited.*

I lost track of the days as I searched the city. I had money; I brought more than $5,000 with me and I had ten good stories in my head that I could write and sell quickly if I needed more. Besides, I wasn't spending except as bait; I was making them spend—of their material resources if they had any, of their persons and of their twisted and slimy souls . . .

Mac was busy; he quickly got used to my erratic comings and goings and didn't say much except to ask me when I thought I'd finally burn my fury out. I had a key to his apartment, of course . . .

There were the pickups in bars—the classiest places too—who thought I was a drunk and lured me to rooms where I was to be rolled or blackmailed. There were the phony husbands who showed up unexpectedly, full of righteous indignation, and the little punks who were supposed to mug me. How many of those fellows I beat up I don't remember, but there were quite a few.

There were the ones who tried to dope me.

These were all merely vicious and obvious. They bored me.

On a slightly more challenging level were the ones who, rotten with disease, lied and didn't care what happened to me so long as they profited. There were the ones who offered to introduce me to "important" people when they thought I had money, but turned indifferent when I admitted that all I possessed was the few dollars in my pocket. There were the ones who were very anxious to help me stop drinking until they learned that I was broke. There were the turncoats, beggars, cheats and snivelers.

None of these were truly evil; they were just more ingenious.

There were the ones who were anxious to marry me right away when they thought I was rich, but changed their minds when I confessed I was lying. Though they wore a price-tag, some of them called me a heel.

None of these were truly evil; only fearful and commercial.

There were the ones who, when I told them I was married and rich, tried to implant in my mind the idea that my wife was somehow unworthy of me, and that they were the ones destiny had ordained for me. Without any help from me, they searched for weak places in my non-existent wife's armor, and when I obliged them, stabbed away mercilessly. They, I think, were truly evil, and more clever than poor Mary had been.

There were the ones who were willing to desert husbands who loved them dearly for me, because I was more handsome, or more virile, or more distinguished, or richer. They too, I thought, were truly evil.

Finally there were the ones—the great majority—who were kind and sweet. These I did not harm, but tried to help. Nor did I harm the ones who were mentally ill.

But nowhere did I find a woman more

wanton and sadistic than Mary had been. Apparently there was a limit to human evil.

THIS section of Jack's manuscript, of course, was much longer than the excerpts I am copying. It was full of long case-histories, complete with minute details of appearance, conversation, and action.

Like most interviews when you're doing a feature profile, my confab with the world-celebrity who was just passing through and had to be caught now or never ran into more time than I had expected. At 7:00 I was nowhere near finished and he invited me to dinner. I phoned the apartment and told Jack I'd be late, to go ahead and eat alone. "How's the story going?" I asked.

He sounded very gay. "Great!" he exulted. "Magnificent psychological study of female evil, only I can't make them evil enough. All dreamed up out of my hat. I'm getting it out of my system, though."

"Good!" I said. "That's the ticket. See you later."

It was after one in the morning when I snapped my notebook shut and crammed it into my pocket. "I've got a good story here," I said with satisfaction.

The Important Person gave me a final scotch-and-soda as a token of amiable parting. As I walked out of the lobby of the Waldorf I ran into an old friend I hadn't seen for months—you do that sometimes—and we dragged each other back for a drink. One drink led to two and two to three and I finally got the bright idea of phoning Jack and having him join us. We were all writers, and it would be a good chance to sit around and swap lies.

"Hi, peavey-pusher lost in the Big City!" I yelped when he answered the phone. "I'm in the Men's Bar at the Waldorf. Get in a cab and come on up here; I want you to meet a friend of mine."

"Lord," he said, "I can't do that. I'm not shaved and I'm in my bathrobe. And it's almost three oclock in the morning."

He had something there; the bar closed at four. "Well, I'll make a date for the three of us for later in the week," I decided. "Okay?"

"Okay."

"How's the story going?"

"Just about finished," he said, with obvious satisfaction. "Almost sixty pages. How's that for jet propulsion? I thought up a swell name for my lamia."

"What?"

"Why, *Lamia,* of course. *Innocente Lamia.* How's that for a name? Sort of Spanish or Italian or something. Exotic. And get the play on words. *Innocent* and *lamia.* Tricky." He was laughing uproariously, something entirely foreign to his quiet nature. He sounded almost like a stranger, and a bitter, cynical one.

THE writing-therapy hadn't helped much, I decided. We'd go into that later. "Well," I said, "You better be careful about those names. I think Lamia is a fairly common name, and I'm sure Innocente is. You don't want to get the pants sued off of you for libel."

"This name will stay," he said coldly. "Anyway, the story probably will never be published."

"I'll be along when the pub closes."

"Okay. See you."

. . . All disappointments; all falling so pitifully short of the ultimate in pure evil. I gave up my search in disgust, and amused myself for an entire day and far into the night writing down the story of my futile quest.

My thoughts kept returning again and again to the idea of a lamia. Now there was evil in female form for you! I looked up the word in Mac's big Webster's: "One of a class of man-devouring monsters, commonly represented with the head and breast of a woman and the body of a serpent. They were believed to assume the forms of beautiful women to allure young men."

Bring on your lamia! I thought. Oh Satan, whether you're a spirit or just the abstraction for very real evil that's present in us all, produce me a lamia! I'll take my chances!

If I wished hard enough, could I materialize a lamia out of thin air? Were there energies that assumed corporeal reality in wish-fulfillment? Were there malign entities that could materialize in the presence of persons receptive to them? Could demons be summoned up or banished at will, and did they sometimes get out of control?

I knew all about hallucinations and I didn't want any. I wanted the real thing.

Am I crazy? I thought. No, coldly sane; just experimenting.

I even thought of a good name for my lamia: Innocente Lamia. *Boy, that was rich! She would be the most exquisite, magnificent, voluptuous, seductive, fascinating, witty, brilliant, amorous, and evil being in female form man had ever experienced.*

Then the phone rang. I was angry at the interruption. It was Mac, half-drunk at the Waldorf. He wanted me to come out and meet some friend of his, but I was glad that it was too late—almost three o'clock in the morning—and that I had the further excuse of not being shaved or dressed. He asked about the story I was writing about my experiences with women, and I told him it was just about finished. I told him that I was going to bring in a lamia—we'd talked about that idea before, how long before seems hazy now—and that I had a name for her, Innocente Lamia. *He warned me about the possibility of libel and wanted me to change the name, but I wouldn't.*

I was relieved when he finally signed off. Now I could get back to my lamia. If I thought hard enough, would she come to me, or would I go to her? Oh, I guessed I'd go to her; she had come-hither wiles that brought men running.

*Where would we meet? Why, in her place of course. What would it be like? Well, not poor, certainly. Lamias don't have to live in rooming-houses. A suite at the Waldorf? No, too many people around who might wonder about the strange procession of men that kept arriving and after awhile left—*strangely changed. *Or didn't the men leave at all; maybe she absorbed them? Or maybe she sucked their blood, and after they were dead had her henchmen* —demons too, no doubt—*take them away and maybe sink them far out at sea? That might account for a lot of disappearances.*

No, she'd have to have a discreet place, where no questions would be asked about her guests, and where odd happenings would be discreetly ignored. Some place if there were screams, the other tenants would not hear them.

A penthouse, of course. A penthouse on the roof of a second-rate, fairly small apartment house, where there'd be a self-service elevator and no lobby staff to snoop and pry. The approach to the penthouse might be dingy, but once you were inside you'd see a place of fantastic opulence—the most magnificent rugs and tapestries and porcelains and jades the world afforded; a scene Aladdin himself had never dreamed of. That would be it.

Well, what would happen after I got there? There'd be the most intriguing preliminaries, of course—exotic drinks and foods and eerie, blood-chilling music and fantastic conversation. I'd drink in her beauty and gloat over her consummate evil, knowing I could have them both forever if I wished. She would make love to me, at first delicately then with wild abandon, and I would refuse myself. She would become angry, pleading, threatening and humble by turns. And I would laugh at her. "You do not deceive me," *I would say with calm coldness,* "I know what you really are; not only is your name *Lamia* but you are also one of the snake-women of legend, a true lamia. You are not human, you are an incarnation of evil. Go ahead, desire me, but you shall not have me, for the price of your love is my soul, which I refuse to pay."

Then she would change her tactics. She would intensify her efforts to seduce me, but she would also bargain with me, offering me riches, power, fame—anything on Earth man could desire—if I would only be hers. She would creep closer into my arms and entwine herself about me like the universal serpent, her forked tongue would probe my mouth deliciously, and I would love her, love her, love her . . .

Wait a minute. This story is getting away from me. Loving her is just what I'm not *going to do. I'm going to spurn her and smash her pride—even demons have pride—just as Mary spurned me and smashed my pride. I'm going to turn on my heel and walk out of her penthouse laughing.*

Yes, that's the way it's going to be. Then I'll be proof forever against the evil in woman. Then I'll be able to search with my soul at peace for a good, true woman to love and adore.

But where's my lamia? How will I find her? I can't walk up to a pretty girl in the

street and say to myself, "That's her, that's one of them." Or can I?

Maybe she'll give me a sign. An odd "Come hither" I'll recognize. Or maybe she'll phone me up. Get a wrong number, maybe, and start talking. "Oh, I'm sorry, but aren't you Jack Winters? My name is Innocente Lamia. Now that we've met in this odd way . . ."

Well, why the hell doesn't she phone? She knows I want her to, or does she? At that, I guess I didn't say so. Innocente Lamia, phone me up. Innocente Lamia, phone me up. Innocente Lamia, phone me up . . .

I'll keep on calling her until she answers.

IT WAS a quarter after four when I climbed out of the taxicab, feeling somewhat unsteady on my pins but extraordinarily brilliant, and made my way up to my apartment. I called jovially to Jack, but there was no reply. I went into the living room, and there was no Jack snoozing on the divan. I went into the study, and I found the brief note on a fresh white sheet in the typewriter:

"Gone to keep a date with Innocente Lamia. We finally made connections. Wish me luck. Jack."

Somehow I felt relieved. Jack had looked bad, hyper-tense and on the verge of hysteria. He'd been typing about twenty-two hours at top speed, if the thick pile of manuscript turned face down beside the typewriter was any clue. Probably he'd felt just ready to blow his top, and had gone for a walk to let off steam. Or even prowl for a woman. I didn't care what he was up to; any distraction was better than just sitting and rehashing that Mary business.

I saw that his blue serge was gone and that he'd shaved. I grinned. Maybe he *had* got a date somehow. I went to bed and was sound asleep before my head hit the pillow.

I WAS awakened almost instantly, it seemed, by a dream or vision that flashed through my slumber like lightning through closed eyelids. I saw an exotic room that was dominated by an enormous low divan that almost merged in the rich rugs surrounding it. Unlike most dreams, which are in black and white, I saw a fantastic variety of color—the deep reds and blues in the divan and the rug, the green of jade statuettes, the soft amber of lights that seemed to come from candles or oil lamps. I smelled the cloying odor of heady incense, the unpleasant muskiness of a snake-pit, and the sharp acrid odor of fear.

On the divan lay what I at first thought was a woman, clad in a long garment so black that it reflected no light. I could see the milky white of her bare shoulders and arms, and the cloud of her ebon hair that was as black as her gown. She lay on her face, and for an instant I believed that she was alone, until I saw a twitching beneath her. Then I realized that she was embracing the body of a man in a blue-serge suit, pressing herself against him, actually entwining herself around him, as though her limbs were boneless and the train of her sable gown was many yards in length. I could not see her feet, nor could I see the face of the man she loved with such abandon.

His body heaved convulsively, and a wordless appeal for help smashed into my brain. The sudden spasm of struggle had thrown her head upward, and for an instant she arched it higher, so that I saw how long and exquisite and white her neck was. Then her head dropped flatly like the head of a striking serpent, and the long black hair dropped once more across the ashen face of my friend. The black coils of her amorphous figure seemed to tighten about him.

I sensed a cry in which there were no words but only meaning, and the meaning was *conquered and lost.* Then, like the sudden breaking of a cinema film, the dream ended and I awoke, to find myself sitting bolt upright in bed, sweat pouring from every pore.

They say that at the moment of death, or as the threat of imminent death looms close, the human brain in a supreme effort sometimes projects a vision of tragedy to loved ones, not infrequently over vast distances. I have read of so many of these alleged instances of telepathic power when great emotional tension existed that I have no reason to disbelieve in their possibility. Was Jack in terrible danger, and had his mind sent me such a message?

I was out of bed and dressed in about nothing flat. Then, however, I stopped

short. I hadn't the faintest idea where he had gone, or whom he was with.

Why I did what I did then I'll never know. There was no sense in it whatever. But my mind was in a sort of somnambulistic state in which everything and nothing was real. I went to the telephone book and started flicking through the Ls. I was running my finger down a column when it stopped as though transfixed, and cold sweat sprang out on my forehead.

"Lamia, Innocente," I read, in small, demure type. The address followed. It was just around the corner, almost.

Then there *was* an Innocente Lamia, and Jack had hit upon her name for his story by sheer, blind chance! I wondered if I wrote a story and called one of my characters Diablo Mephisto I'd find out that a gentleman by that name actually existed.

My hands were shaking—I tried to convince myself that it was from the liquor—as I picked up the phone and dialed her number. A delicious voice answered, "Yes?"

"I'd like to speak to Miss Innocente Lamia, if I may, please. Please forgive my calling at this hour, but . . ."

"This is she," the cello-like voice answered. There was a little laugh, almost like a throaty hum. "You're Thorp McClusky, aren't you?"

"Yes," I stammered, "but, but . . ."

"Jack Winters is here, you know," the voice went on calmly yet liltingly. "He hoped you might call."

That sounded strange. How the devil did he know I'd find out where he was?

Why, you fool, the note he left in the typewriter, of course.

"Put him on the wire. I want to talk to him."

"Uhh, uhh." I sensed that she was shaking her head, and for some reason or other I got a clear mental image of her as having exquisite white skin and ebon-black hair. "No can do. Your little friend from the lumbercamps has passed out cold. I gave him some of my very, very special cordial, and I guess he misjudged its wallop.

"But I'll talk to you, though," she added brightly, each syllable seductive with invitation. "If you're as nice and gentlemanly and obliging as he was—my, my, my!"

"Whaddo you mean, *was?*" I snapped. My head was beginning to clear and I wanted to get the thing over with. I'd forgotten all about the dream that woke me up.

SHE laughed again; it was both tinkly as glass and deep as space.

"Well," she pointed out reasonably, "I do mean *was*. He's very much in the past tense now; you'd understand if you saw him. And he's no good to me or anybody else if he's passed out, is he? He *was* before, but now he ain't no more." This time her laughter pealed.

I had to laugh myself. "Lady," I said, "I must admit you're funny. What are you going to do about Jack?"

"Um," she said. "Well, I was going to let him sleep here, but now that you've called I think you'd better come and get him. You know, I hoped you'd call; I rather wanted to see what you looked like."

"Oh now, cut that out," I said. "I'm an old happily married man; been married these umpteen years. Jack's single, young, handsome and on the rebound. Bowl in one alley and you'll get more strikes." I was getting peevish; I wasn't able to cope with her in wit; and I felt damnably sleepy.

"Okay," she agreed instantly. "But if I make a play for you you'll know it. Coming to get the body?"

"Be right over," I said. "What's the apartment number?"

She assumed an affected drawl. "Why, the penthouse, of course, my deah. What did you expect?"

I hadn't expected anything; for all I knew, she lived in a barrel.

Then she laughed again. "Penthouse sounds gaudy, I know, but this is really a rundown old place, turtle-slow elevators, nothing chi-chi. Once you get up here, though, it's pretty nice."

"All right," I said, "I'll whistle up my kiddie-car."

"You won't need a taxi; it's only a five-minute walk."

That was true; the address—270 East 16th Street—was only a couple of corners and a couple of short blocks from my place. I tried to remember what her house looked like; it wasn't the big one on the corner of Third Avenue, obviously; it must be quite a way further down.

I walked. I passed the big church and crossed a narrow up-and-down street and there it was—270. It was an old place with iron fire-escapes zigzagging across the front, about eight stories tall. I went through the silent lobby with the cracked marble-and-plaster walls and the worn rugs on the checkerboard marble floor and got into the rickety, open-grille elevator that had been modernized by the installation of push-button controls. I pushed the button that said "Penthouse" and the elevator creaked slowly upward. When it halted the grille-door slid back and I stepped out. I was in a little brick hallway that was actually the top of the stairwell. Across the landing a door stood open. From a large room beyond poured soft, shimmering light that seemed to come from many sources and to have picked up the hues of many wonderful objects. Leaning against the doorjamb was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.

She was young, no more than twenty-three. She was just an inch or two taller than average and her long white neck supported her head proudly. The lines of her body flowed rather than curved, and the low-cut, obsidian-black evening-gown she wore fitted her exquisitely voluptuous figure so perfectly that it might have been painted on.

Her mouth was sensitive and full of promise; her eyes large and black and smouldering, yet humorous too. Her ebon hair lay like waves from the River Styx across her milky shoulders; apparently she had already started to prepare for bed. Her lips were startlingly red against the pallor of her face; she had, I supposed, just put on fresh lipstick.

She stood in an odd position, with her arms folded. A slow smile grew on her face.

"Well *darling!*" she said. "Come right in!" As though by sudden impulse she stepped forward with an odd, serpentine, *boneless* undulation. Her white arms slid around my neck, I felt a soft hand pressing my head forward and downward, and then her warm, pulsing lips hungrily, thirstily found mine.

Now wait a minute, I thought, and raised both arms to gently loosen the clinging grasp about my neck. Her hands seized my wrists in grips of steel. . . .

"OKAY, buddy," a masculine voice snapped sharply. "Don't try to hit a cop, or you'll get pulverized. Relax now, and let them hands down easy."

The vision faded. I was standing just inside the stone gates of a public park I knew well—Stuyvesant Park, which runs from 15th to 17th Street just east of Third Avenue. Before me stood a beefy and very real policeman, gripping both my wrists. A few feet away was another cop, watching alertly. The pearly gray of dawn was faintly tinged with gold, and I knew that an instant before the sun had risen.

I let my arms relax. Tried to collect my thoughts. "We been trailing you for ten minutes," the second cop said, not unkindly. "You came down Third Avenue walking like a blind man and over into the park. You hopped up?"

The other cop looked closely at my eyes. He shook his head. "You have spells or anything?" he asked.

I shook my head vaguely. "No, never before this." I looked around unbelievingly—at the shadowy trees, the gray fountain, the vacant benches, the plots of sorry grass surrounded by low fences.

Then I screamed.

On the grass, partly hidden by a row of benches and not twenty feet away, lay the body of a man in a blue-serge suit. I knew instinctively that it was Jack. And I knew too that he was dead.

I REMEMBER little about the wailing radio-patrol cars that arrived swiftly, the throng of cops and ordinary citizens that appeared from nowhere, the ambulance that pulled up close, its red beacon flashing. I remember them taking me away in some kind of a vehicle, and I remember flashes of a police station and my apartment. I remember men asking me questions, questions, questions . . .

Later I remember a white hospital bed and men in white jackets and also in business suits talking to me and cracking my knees and other things. I remember thinking *It was just day, then night, now it's day again; the time's going too fast.* And

I remember being told with what seemed unnecessary kindness and consideration that I could go home now.

SO HERE I am. I have read last night's and this morning's papers; they make sorry reading. I am free from suspicion; the police version is that I must have gone out looking for my friend, come upon his body, and suffered temporary derangement from shock.

I don't even know whether or not the police read Jack's manuscript. It was still lying face down on the desk when I returned this morning.

But I have read it, every word. It ends like a fiction story with a post-script tacked on. There are pages and pages of description about an adventure with a lamia who—so goes the story—telephoned Jack after he'd concentrated on wishing her to telephone for a very long time. By an amazing coincidence, she appears to be exactly the same woman, or being, or entity, that he described so beautifully and in such detail before—again in the story—she responded to his thought-summons to call. And the same black-white slithery creature I had seen in my dream, and later when I had the hallucination in the park.

His story appears to end in triumph. He repelled the being's advances and spurned her bribes, and left her penthouse treading on air while she wailed a dirge of the damned. *And though, many times since, I have walked the streets of that neighborhood searching for the entrance to that dingy little apartment-house where Innocente Lamia had her strange existence, I have never been able to find it,* he concluded. *I have searched for her name in the telephone book; it is not there. Sometimes I am inclined to believe that the experience was all a dream, an hallucination born of my evil hatred of a real woman I should have pitied, regardless of her faults. May God forgive me for my blindness and false pride.*

Then came the post-script (not the right word for it, of course), which continued immediately after the above ending: *I have smoked a couple of cigarettes and have been thinking things over, and I do not think this story is half bad. It is not the sort of thing I have been accustomed to doing, of course, but I feel that the conceptions of varying degrees of evil in woman, and finally the ultimate evil in a being that is woman only in form and allure, comprise a really good study in abnormal psychology —maybe my own—which should be published. And the conflict and triumph of a man who seeks to find for himself the goodness in woman through spurning the evil I consider not half bad, too.*

I think that if I fix this story up it will find a market. Certainly I feel much more at peace merely through having written it. One thing bothers me; I can change all the names easily enough with the exception of Innocente Lamia—*that one appears to me so dramatic, though perhaps corny, that I want to keep it. Mac said something about libel; I shall look her name up in the telephone book.*

Dammit, there is an Innocente Lamia in the telephone book. She even lives very near here—270 East 16th Street.

Well, how about another name?

I can't think of any one-tenth as good.

I wonder if she would object to my using her name and switching the locale of the story away uptown somewhere.

I wonder if I could get around it by saying there are actual flesh-and-blood girls by the name of Innocente Lamia in New York —all very normal, sweet girls indeed and not *snake-demons?*

I better call her up.

She'll bawl the devil out of me; it's in the middle of the night.

Better wait until morning.

I can't wait until morning; I'll go crazy waiting. I'm going to phone her now.

Well, I've phoned her. She was very reasonable. In fact, I didn't even wake her up; she said she'd been at some late affair or something and was still wide awake. She said, "Sure, go ahead and use my name, but for Pete's sake change the address; if I'm as evil as your story makes out I can't very well sue you for libel but I don't want the neighbors crossing their fingers when they see me coming on the street." She's got a marvelous sense of humor and a beautiful speaking voice.

Then she said something odd. She asked me if I believed in telepathy and I said I

didn't know: I'd never experienced it. But she said that she'd been sitting up because she had a hunch that a man named Jack Winters would call and that just this conversation would take place. And, of course, I did *call. And I* had *been thinking about her name, thinking very hard about it and on purpose. So I guess that proves telepathy in my own personal experience.*

There's something still odder. She lives in a penthouse. I know because she invited me over for a drink—"If we're en rapport *we needn't be conventional about an introduction or the time of day or night, need we?" she said—and I'm going.*

I'll just get a quick shave, put on my blue-serge, leave a note for Mac telling him we made connections, and be on my way. I'd like to see his face when he reads that note.

THAT was the way his manuscript ended, in the middle of Page 72.

So I sit here, my thoughts swirling, wondering. I looked up Innocente Lamia in the telephone book; the name isn't there, though I could swear I read it clearly last night. There *is* a Jack Lamia in the New York telephone book; he's the only Lamia in the Manhattan directory.

That address I thought I read—270 East 16th Street. There isn't any such address; if there were, however, it would be in Stuyvesant Square Park, about where I was standing when the police found me. East 16th Street breaks off on one side of the park and resumes again on the other.

Except for the first page, I read none of Jack's manuscript until this morning, after I was released from Bellevue. But his written description of the dingy apartment-house, the penthouse, and the hallucination or *thing* that called itself Innocente Lamia tallies with my own.

Finally, there is the mystery of why, how, and by whom Jack was murdered. I know the police will never find the motive nor the murderer, for neither was human.

What puzzles them most is the *how*. For Jack's body, when it was found, was completely drained of blood, though there was not a mark of violence on it anywhere. *And almost every bone in his body was broken, as though by the embrace of a monstrous python.*

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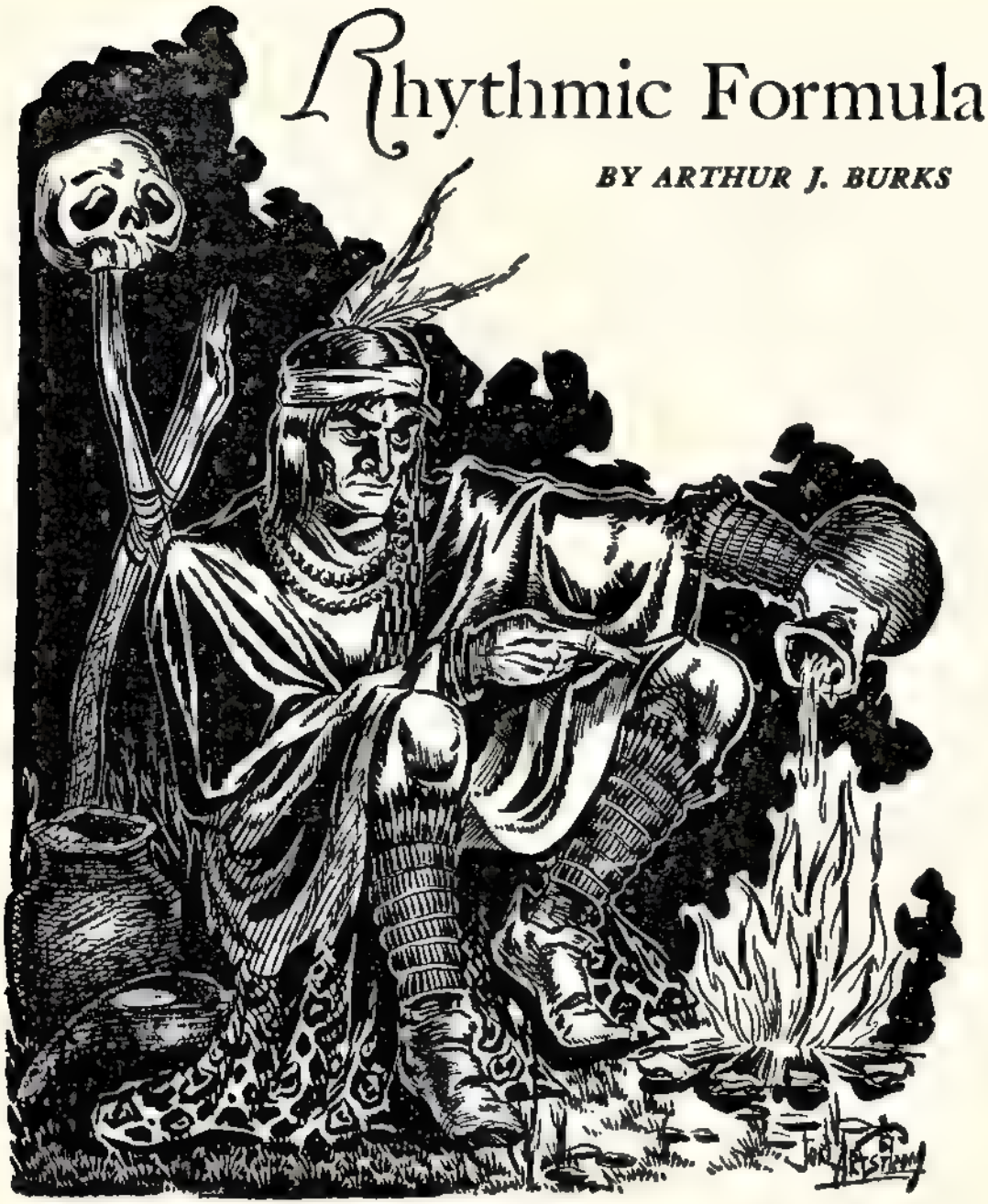
Rhythmic Formula

BY ARTHUR J. BURKS



. . . a secret he brought back from the jungles.

RUSS CREAVEY had spent most of his life in the Brazilian jungles. He had worked hard at his adventures, but he had never had much money or fame, and sometimes not enough of the first to live on, until the latter, fame, gave him luck and he married two rich women in succession. He murdered them both by the secret Mundurucu-Indian formula of *sap-kaure*. There hadn't been so much as an

Heading by Jon Arfstrom

eyebrow of suspicion lifted. His two wives, after giving him plenty of money outright, thus insuring him against any possible want, had made him beneficiary of whopping life insurance policies. That fact might have caused the law to take some action if medical science had not reported both death as by "heart failure." The insurance companies didn't even delay payment.

The murders had been years apart, the policies with two different companies.

He was a free man each time, independent beyond any dreams he had ever had. He could outfit and finance the biggest expedition the Amazon had ever heard of, if he felt like it.

Russ Creavey was a man of fifty, fatherly, white-haired, gentle. His name was known throughout the scientific world. As an ethnologist he was without peer. Scientific background, he discovered, was a swell screen for murder. The scientific approach also precluded anything like conscience. His two rich wives, because of their money, had tried to run him, to pin him down. They had tried especially to keep him out of the jungles.

He killed Hermine, his first wife, married when he was forty-four, then spent two joyous years in the jungles without even using up the interest on the money she had left him. It had been on the Upper Cururu, in the unexplored land of the Waiaun'en, that he had again shaken hands with Hakaiapömpö, medicine man, who had taught him the rhythm of *sapkaure*, the murder rhythm which the old man had discovered for himself and kept secret because with it he could kill off his enemies without anybody murdering or exiling him.

"I put oil of *chiririshep* into their coffee," he told Creavey, "or prescribe it and have their wives administer it. Then, very quietly in the night, I make use of the rhythm. One must be careful not to make a sound and get caught!"

Creavey wanted more information.

"Once your victim is asleep," said Hakaiapömpö, "you simply use the palm of your hand, so, lifting and lowering it in rhythm. It strikes him at *this* particular spot on the abdomen and accommodates its tempo to the heartbeat. When they are attuned you increase the rhythm of the palm. The heart beat increases with it to the point where the heart cannot endure, and fails."

If that worked, Creavey realized, it was the proper design for the perfect murder. He didn't believe it until old Hakaiapömpö proved it to him, using a Gaiapo prisoner as a demonstrator.

HITHERTO, when Russ Creavy had returned to the States after some spectacular journey he had been brusque and impatient with the man-hungry women who invariably pressed around when he lectured at their clubs, or wrote him at his hotel or club. There had been several times when he could have married money. He hadn't. Now, armed with the secret rhythm of *sapkaure*, he felt himself ripe for marriage —for money. Hermine made it even easier than he had hoped; she nagged the life out of him in private, inspiring him to kill; she coddled him in public, made propaganda in the newspapers of the money she spent on him and gave to him for scientific research. She was publicity hungry, as most of the women had been who had annoyed him in the past.

Hakaiapömpö provided Russ Creavey with powdered bark of the *chiririshep*. He hadn't explained it to Hermine. He just dropped some of it into her tea before bedtime, waited for her to go to sleep, then began using his palm in the careful, precise rhythm of the *sapkaure*. Old Hakaiapömpö had been a careful teacher, insisting on perfection. It worked like a charm. He knew when the brain of Hermine came awake. He grinned at her when her eyes opened —the glazed eyes of the drugged. She didn't know, at first, what he was trying to do. The hand-patting was so much like a series of caresses, soothing, restful—until the heart picked up the beat, the beat increased, and something akin to suffocation built up in the victim until her heart stopped. It was fun to talk to Hermine while she died.

"You're dying, my love!" he told her. "It's a perfect murder, too. I got it from the Indians. Impossible to trace it. Just heart failure, my own, just heart failure. The sedative I slipped into your tea left no trace. I wonder, in the minutes you have

left, whether you regret nagging me? If you had a chance to apologize on bended knees, would you do it?"

Her eyes showed she understood. They pleaded with him. They agreed to anything. He knew better than to give her a chance. If he did she would oppose him, take away the money she had given him, cancel her life insurance policy.

He knew her closeness in money matters. She gave him thousands in public, took it back in private.

It took over an hour, during which an interruption by anybody would have spelled catastrophe—though he didn't think of that until later—for her heart to come to a dead stop, her dead body to relax, her staring eyes to cease their accusation. It was a little tiring, but the murder made him rich.

Without hesitation he called Hermine's personal physician. There were no marks on her body. He told the doctor he had sat up late, reading, while Hermine preceded him to their bedroom; how he had gone to her and found her dead.

"Heart failure," the doctor said, only he called it a high sounding name. "She was predisposed to it."

The last statement helped. He hadn't even known of the weak heart. Luck seemed to be with him throughout, after practically no financial luck at all. When he could decently get away into the wilds, after the funeral of Hermine, he went right back to the headwaters of the Cururu, to find old Hakaiapömpö still living. The old man had got away with many more murders. Russ Creavey hadn't forgotten the Mundurucu dialect. Once he had thought if he ever married it would be one of Hakaiapömpö's relatives. He had said so and the old man had been delighted. Now, grinning, Russ Creavey renewed the suggestion.

"No," said the Indian, "not now. There might be temptation to practice it, since you know the secret. One murderer in the family is enough. So far, I love my female relatives too much to see them killed!"

RUSS CREAVEY spent six months with the old one in his *maloca,* only to discover to his amazement that he missed civilization as he never had when he had spent *years* in the jungles before. He went home. There was the usual publicity, round of lectures. . . .

And Karen!

There were others besides Karen, but she was the most persistent, the most interested in his work, had the most money. She told him so. His private investigations more than bore out her boasts. She had been twice married before, which didn't matter to him until, after they were married, she compared him unfavorably with both former husbands.

He began practicing the rhythm again, playing up to Karen's every whim until she got around to the insurance policy and had, besides, given him even more money than Hermine had. He told her the story of his life, spoke respectfully of his first wife—he had to speak of her since the fact of his previous marriage was a public matter and he was a public figure—gave her all the details of his expeditions she would listen to. But he did not tell her how Hermine had died, until she was dying in the same way!

He stood Karen for almost two years. Then he introduced her to the rhythm of *sapkaure.* She wakened to find she could neither move nor speak; could only hear and feel.

"I am very sick of you, darling!" Russ Creavey told her. "This is what I did to Hermine when she also became unendurable. You are the only person in the world to know."

He felt the horror in her body, saw it in her eyes, heard it in the rising thud of her heartbeats as his practiced hand, palm downward, rose and fell without sound, touching her body in the right place and always that place . . . rising . . . falling . . . tap-tapping. . . .

Until she stiffened and died, relaxing, and he was twice as wealthy as he had been, barring such red tape as had to be unraveled. Two wives dying of heart failure, whatever technical, high-sounding name was used, might have occasioned questions if he had been less important in scientific circles. To question Russell Creavey simply wasn't done.

For the second time he got away with murder. He was "bowed down with sorrow," the newspapers said, eager only to

return to the jungles, this time to stay. Whatever he learned he would send out; whatever he collected he would ship to wherever it would benefit the world most. He would, he told himself ironically, make the deaths of Hermine and Karen mean something. No reason at all why they could not be martyrs to science, though none but himself would ever know that.

WHEN a decent time had elapsed he gave to the press details of his next expedition to the headwaters of the Cururu. He had the urge to see his murder mentor again. They were two who understood each other perfectly. There were women and girls in the tribe who were attractive. The old man would not oppose his marriage to one who was not a relative. If he tired of such a wife—he grinned to himself as the thought came—Hakaiapömpö would perhaps, for a price, take off his hands the task of erasing her. Anyway, it was something that could be talked over. This time, he told the press, he was leaving civilization for good. He would end his days in the jungles. His picture, his most distinguished poses, went around the world.

It seemed quite natural that both men and women interested in his line of endeavor should contact him. He thought nothing of it when Leslie Deane, a noted explorer in her own right, a little under forty years of age, asked for an interview. She had crossed trails with him in foreign lands, she said, without saying just where. He knew much about her. She was as famous in her way as he was in his—more, even, because she was a woman.

"She's probably jealous," he thought when he decided to see her. "Trying to cash in on my name somehow. She has a proposition of some kind to make, that's certain. Everybody in civilization has an axe to grind."

She'd be mannish, brusque, with a bone-crushing handshake, he decided. There was probably an excellent reason why she had never married, though she had been quoted as saying she was too busy hunting out the world's large and little wonders. Unquestionably she would be hard to take. One thing about her, she shared one thing with most scientists; she had scarcely enough money to keep her fed, housed and clothed. He checked on that before he agreed to see her.

"She may want money, but no, it can't be that; she'll think I'm as poor as she is."

Reports of his inheritance had received no recent mention in the newspapers.

Leslie Deane surprised him. The second he saw her he wondered whose pictures, purporting to be hers, had been run in magazines and newspapers. She was smartly dressed, looked younger than she was, had no gray in her neat hairdo, didn't wear spectacles or look like a scientist. She was so different that he felt it necessary to check on her technical knowledge with a few questions. She qualified. Her qualifications exceeded his own.

"I'm delighted you've come to me," he told her. "I'm not even in a hurry to come to the point and ask you what you want!"

"I'll tell you anyway," she said. "I'm going back into the jungles with you!"

She didn't ask. She asserted. Before she left him, after the interview lasted for hours, he wondered how he had managed to live so many years without her. He didn't ask where she had crossed his trail before. It would never have occurred to him, for instance, that she also might have met Hakaiapömpö. If there were really no fool like an old fool, he had forgotten ever hearing any such thing. He didn't know whether he proposed marriage or she simply gathered him under her capable wing and carried him off to the license bureau.

She wanted absolutely nothing from him, she told him, save the chance to further his work, to spend the rest of her life at his side. She knew and loved the jungles—especially the African ones, though this time his destination was Venezuela—and could spend years in them without fretting.

She wanted nothing, she kept insisting, even when he put his bank accounts in her name, gave her the checkbooks, took out life insurance though the premiums at his age were *plenty*.

How in the name of time had he ever considered a Mundrucu woman for the real-for-sure, until-death-us-do-part mate?

They went by boat because it took

longer, a week. There were lazy days and nights, utterly perfect. He was mad about her.

He stayed mad about her until he got his first, and last, rude shock.

He wakened to find himself unable to move, the night of the fifth day out. He could only think, feel, hear—and what he heard was the soothing, gentle voice of Leslie Creavey.

"This will be a shock to you, Russell," she crooned. "But it was a shock to me to find the *chiririshep* powder in your duffel and to realize that the man I've looked up to for years had already murdered two wives! Did you have some reason to bring it along now, darling? Oh, of course you cannot answer me, except with your eyes! I must say, they do not look kindly!"

Outside in the night he could hear the snoring of the Atlantic past the porthole. Usually the sound soothed him. Now it roared in his head, for the best of reasons. His Leslie continued:

"A girl in my position," she said, "has to take care of herself or she's sunk! I'll carry on with your work, of course, for more years than you would have lived anyway, old as you are! I can't say I'm sorry it's turning out this way; I think I'm beginning to be bored with marriage—to you, anyway!"

She knew the rhythm of *sapkaure* perfectly.

She talked more and he heard it all, could do nothing. Fortunately his heart could not endure as much pressure as Hermine's and Karen's had.

"Hakaiapömpö didn't mention me to you, of course," were among the last words he heard, "since I became his pupil after your time!"

A Bit of Moss

by Suzanne Pickett

A bit of moss—and in it the undeniable imprint of human teeth.

Heading by Joseph Eberle

SOMETHING had happened to the moss! Every day fresh chunks of it were missing. Martha Sylvan looked around her with sudden interest. Her eyes lighted for a minute. Then they dulled and she sighed mournfully. She thought of the day she had sat beside the coffin and looked through burning eyes at her father; a little, wizened, wrinkled man.

He was so still, so insignificant. How had he managed to fill all of her life? Now he was gone she had no one, nothing. "Father?" she whispered in anguish. Almost she heard his voice. The deep tones that had ruled her life, saw the flash of his eyes. He was living again. There was his keen mind, his tenderness and his—jealous, enveloping love for her.

He had guided her all of his life. Her studies, her books, music, literature. And his taste was exquisite in everything. Fear, cold, still fear that was her constant companion edged closer to her. What would she do now? She was twenty-five. She had no friends and remoteness had grown in her until it was part of her being.

She stared at the moss again. Puzzled at its disappearance. Interest lighted her eyes again. The fear receded and with its leaving came a doubtful relief. A queer sense of freedom. Other girls loved and married. Perhaps she could live too. But whom *could* she love? Was there anyone, anywhere—

A piece of moss hit her on the foot! She picked it up and scanned the woods. "I wonder who did that?" she whispered. It was suddenly cold. She pulled her wrap around her and hurried home.

The maid had kindled a fire in the library. Martha held out a chilled hand and looked at the moss. She opened her mouth to call the girl, then closed it. "She might

leave, too," Martha whispered. "They can't all leave me."

There was only the gardener now, a colored woman who came to cook and clean by day and one maid who stayed in the house. Other servants stayed a day, perhaps two or three with frightened faces, then left. This girl had been with her a month.

"She *mustn't* leave me!" Martha said. "Anyhow, it's pure imagination. No one COULD have walked with me from the woods! I would have seen him!" She fingered the moss, hastily thrust it into her pocket. "Perhaps I'm going mad and don't know it," she whispered. "I must talk to someone!" Her voice rose. But whom did she know? She stared at the fire a minute, then smiled. Doctor Glengarry, of course. He was very nice. Father had always liked him.

Her fingers trembled eagerly as she dialed his number. She thought she heard a sigh, and whirled. There was no one there.

"Something upset you?" the doctor asked curiously when he came in.

"Well—I was scared for a minute."

"Yes?" He waited until she sat down, then sat beside her. "Tell me," he said. "What did you see?"

"You'll laugh at me."

"I won't laugh." He had reddish, brown hair, and blue eyes in a thin, narrow face. He regarded her a minute. "I have heard of your ghosts," he said abruptly. "Tell me. What did you see?"

"It was just a piece of moss." Her hand rubbed the moss in her pocket.

"A piece of moss? Queer thing to frighten you."

"But who would eat moss?" She handed it to him.

He examined it, a doubtful look on his face. "Open your mouth," he told her. He inspected her small, white teeth. "Your mouth is too small," he said and looked again at the clear, round imprint of human teeth in the moss. "A beautiful bite," he remarked and handed it back to her.

He chatted a few minutes then arose to go. "Take these if you can't sleep." He gave her a small envelope.

"You—you think I'm crazy?" she whispered.

His eyes were tense, eager. "No," he said. "There's something—odd—around here. I have felt it myself. If—if anything happens—Well, let me know."

After he left, Martha locked and barred the door. She washed her face, brushed her teeth and slipped into bed. But she was not sleepy! She waited expectantly for something, for someone. Finally, she grew drowsy, then suddenly was wide awake. Someone was in the room. Someone kind, gentle, good.

"What is it?" she whispered. "Who are you? Speak please." The night was utterly dark, the moon was not up and clouds hid the stars. "What do you want?" she asked, and wondered that she was not afraid.

Two lips were pressed to hers.

Her lips tingled and a great stillness and wonder and joy swept through her. "You?" she breathed. "Who are you?"

A voice spoke to her. Strange, wonderful, yibrant. An accent she couldn't recognize. A sound like nothing on earth. "I will not hurt you," the voice said.

She was amazed that she still felt no fear. That her joy increased. I'm asleep of course, she thought. But she heard herself ask, "Who are you?"

"I am Maris."

"Maris?" she wondered. "How did you get in?" He did not answer and she was silent awhile. Then doubt and grief entered her. "I'm dreaming of course." She began to weep.

Again the lips were pressed to hers. "Is that a dream?" the voice asked, close to her ear. A cheek brushed hers and she reached to feel his head and rub his smooth hair. She had never felt any like it. Soft and velvety rough like—she caught her breath. Like woods moss!

Her fingers moved to his neck and shoulders. The muscles were powerful under her touch. She felt a garment of some sort. A vest perhaps, like satin, or like fur. Yet soft as neither of these was soft.

"Let me see you." She was not afraid, but eager as she reached for the light.

"Please." Strong fingers held her hand.

"But I want to see you."

"Trust me," the voice pleaded. "Don't turn on the light."

"Are you—" she hesitated, perhaps he had been a soldier—"are you disfigured?"

He chuckled. She smiled at the sound. Like a woodland brook after rain. "Feel of my face," he said.

She hesitated and grief and fear swept over her again. Let me go on dreaming, she thought. Don't let me wake. Yet how could this be a dream. There was his voice and he was beside her. She felt the warmth of his body, and the joy his presence gave her was real.

SHE touched a broad forehead. Slid her fingers over a thin, firm nose. His lips were soft and strong, his eyes long, with thick, long lashes. The lashes moved, the corners of his eyes wrinkled and she knew he was smiling. Her hand traced his lips and moved to his chin. It was firm and strong with the hint of a dimple. "Why can't I see you then?" she asked.

"Trust me," he said again, his voice gentle, soothing, sweet; yet deep with wonderful beauty. "I will not harm you."

"Are you real?"

"How can I prove it?"

She sat up in bed and he sat beside her. "If I could only see you," she pleaded.

"Are you afraid of me?"

"No," she said with wonder. "Of course not."

"Then trust me," he said the third time. "There is a reason."

"But who are you?"

"If I told you wouldn't believe. Humans are full of doubt."

"Humans?" she asked. "You sound as if—" Then suddenly, in alarm, "But ghosts don't have flesh and muscles, and angels have wings, or I thought they did. Surely you're not an angel."

He laughed. "No. An angel wouldn't kiss you. I am Maris, I am here, and God help me, I love you."

"You know God then?"

"Of course." He was silent awhile.

"Surely I'll wake in the morning and find this a dream," she sighed. "But I wish it were real and the waking a dream."

"It is real," the tender, wonderful voice said.

"Are you in truth alive?"

"As surely as you live, I do."

"Where is your home?"

"My home," he sighed. "I was banished from home."

"Tell me about it."

"It is not permitted."

"But you were banished. What can they do?"

"One obeys."

"How can they make you? Do they have spies? Will they harm you?"

"Of course not. They never harm any."

"Then you're certainly not of this earth. I wonder." She touched his face, put her hand to his chest, felt the steady beating of his heart. "They tell us there is life on Mars. Do you come from Mars?"

"Oh no!"

"You know the Martians then?"

"We," he paused. "We have nothing to do with them. And earth would do well to forget them."

"But where are you from?"

He was silent.

"A star?"

"Hardly."

"One of the planets?"

"Perhaps."

"Which?"

Again he was silent.

"Venus?" she felt him stiffen, then slowly relax. "I wonder," he remarked softly. "That they do not guess."

"Then it is Venus?"

"If I told, would it profit you?"

"Whom do you obey?"

"The powers that be."

"And everyone obeys?"

"Yes."

"Then why were you banished?"

"I sinned."

"How could you?"

He paused. "I was one of those who studied your planet. You were such interesting beings. I desired to come to earth."

"Was that a sin?"

"I must go," he cried suddenly. "I will return."

"No! No Maris. Do not leave me. I will have no one." But he was no longer there. Martha lay a minute, wondering. A glimmer of moonlight came through the window. She searched the room as the light became stronger. He was nowhere in sight.

"I was asleep," she told herself. "And

dreaming. I must have been." She looked at the bed where he had been sitting. There was the print. She touched the place, it was still warm.

"Maris!" she cried. "Maris, where are you?"

Her cry echoed through the night. She wept herself to sleep. But the next morning it was a new world. All of the sadness, all of the emptiness gone. It WAS a dream, of course. But tonight—perhaps he would come again.

She walked to the village for mail, then hurried home. What if he should come in the daytime? But the house was empty, warm and friendly. There was no need of a fire.

The long day finally ended and night came on. Martha sat in the dark and waited for Maris. Just the memory of his voice sent joy all through her. She was mad of course.

The years of living in a different world, and now the loneliness, she knew, had affected her mind. Yet she was happy. She had never imagined such happiness. What was there about his voice, his touch, that made her love and trust him as she had never loved any, not even her father?

It was dark, very dark and he had not come. Every sound in the night made her tremble. The sighing of the wind, the creak of the great house as the heat of the day left its walls. "I'm not crazy," she said. "He DID come. Maris! Where are you?"

"I am here." His hand touched her cheek and he was behind her.

"Oh," she whispered. "I thought you were a dream."

HE LAUGHED. The music of his voice filled the room. "I am no dream," he told her positively. He came around the couch and sat beside her.

"Why can't I see you then?"

"You wouldn't believe if I told you."

"You think I won't?" her voice was low. "Try me."

"Perhaps," he promised. "Sometimes."

With this she was content. Quietly, she sat beside him. "Are you really from another world?" she asked.

"Really," he answered sadly.

"What is it like?"

"Wonderful."

"Describe it. I would like to know."

"I will tell what I can. There are trees and water and soft clouds. The light is a pink haze, the color of your cheeks," he touched them. "There is a feeling of gladness and joy, and there is no fear."

"But the cities, the people, what about them?"

"The cities are clean and beautiful. No crowds, as you have, but wide and roomy. The people; my mother and father—" he choked. "But I cannot tell you more."

"You would tell if you could? You are sincere?"

"I am sincere. We do not lie."

"No?" she asked.

"No," he replied gravely.

"Will you return?"

"If I may."

"It is so much better than earth then?"

"It is so much better than earth."

"Could I go with you?"

"Perhaps they would not let you."

"Why?"

"We hoped," he stopped as if weighing his words carefully. "We hoped to communicate with you when you split the atom, then you made the bomb."

"What difference did that make?"

"You might have learned to reach us, and —there are no wars on—our planet. Perhaps—if you would cease your fightings—" he stopped suddenly. "I must go."

A minute later the moonlight flooded the room.

THE next night he took her in his arms when he came. "Martha," his voice was low, throbbing, sweet. "I love you so. Do you love me?"

"Yes," she said. "Oh yes."

"And you trust me?"

"Of course."

"I want you," he said tenderly. "Always, for my own."

"But who would marry us?"

"Is that necessary?"

"For me it is."

He was silent awhile. "Do they not marry in your home?" she asked at last.

"As the swans of earth marry."

"The swans," she mused. "They mate for life. You mean—"

"So," he said. "Even so." Again he was silent, then, "We could make our vows."

"Before whom?"

"Before God."

"Would that suffice?"

"With me even that is not necessary. You know your own heart."

She put her hand to his heart, felt its beating. "I had rather," she whispered gently. "It would seem holy then."

Together they knelt, his arm was around her. She felt that he looked towards heaven. "You first," she whispered.

"In Thy presence, High and Holy one," he began, his voice solemn, grave, beautiful. "And before Thy throne. I take this woman as my own. I promise Thee and her that I will ever love and cherish her. Keep myself for her only, and strive to please her in all things as long as it is pleasing to Thee." He paused awhile, then whispered "Amen." It seemed that an unseen choir swelled, "Amen, and amen."

Martha listened a minute, then returned to earth. "You forgot," she reminded him gently. "You forgot one thing."

"What?"

"Until death, do us part."

"Until death—" she felt him shiver and his voice lowered, took on a mourning note, "do us part." It strengthened, became joyful.

He paused a moment. "Now you," he said. "You darling."

As best she could remember, and with a glory in her face, Martha repeated the words of Maris.

The moon rose later each night and Martha's happiness grew. It couldn't be true. She was mad, or else she was the only sane person on earth and he DID exist. But a girl could not imagine such perfect happiness, nor could she have imagined or dreamed his voice. There was no earthly sound like it to remember in dreams. Maris WAS. He did exist. He loved her and he was all of life to Martha.

A night came when there was no moon!

Martha woke just before dawn. There was a glimmer of light in the room. Maris slept beside her. She listened a minute to his soft breathing, then, I will see him! she thought, and looked at the pillow beside her where his head lay.

There was the indentation. There was his soft breathing. There was even the strange sweetness of his breath, like woods in the springtime. And there beside her, under the sheet that followed the outlines of his body was nothing that she could see. She put her hand to his face and felt his eyes when they opened.

"Maris," she whispered. "Maris, I'm blind!"

The covers beside her moved before she realized that she COULD see them, and his hand covered her eyes.

"No my sweet, no Martha," he said, then cried in despair. "My God, why did I go to sleep?"

"What is it Maris? Why can't I see you?"

"I am invisible to humans," he told her simply.

But that is impossible! You are here, you are alive, I feel you!"

"Can you feel electricity?"

"Yes, but—"

"Can the invisible atom destroy cities?"

"Yes, but—"

"I am as real as you are!" he told her fiercely. "And I love you."

"Can you see me?"

"Of course."

She felt his face again. "Bind my eyes," she said hastily.

"No," he told her. "No."

"I can't bear to look at you and not see you."

"You must get used to it darling. Now we can be together always."

SUDDENLY, she was happy again. "I could love you if I were blind," she said. "So what does it matter?"

"What about the servants?" he asked. "They will think it queer if they hear us talking."

"We must get rid of them."

"But you are not used to work."

"You can help me," she teased, then sobered. "There's very little work really, if we only used part of the house. Everything in the kitchen is electric. All you have to do is put the dishes in the washer."

"What do you eat?" Martha asked Maris one day. "You never eat with me."

"It would seem strange to you."

"Nothing is strange any more unless it be earth and its inhabitants."

Her hand was on his face and she felt him smile, felt his eyes under his lids as he looked at her. "Moss," he said. "Woods moss. I have concentrated food with me of course, but it does not always satisfy. Our foods do not grow here, but moss is like."

"How was it when you first came to earth?" she asked another time.

He was silent awhile, then his voice low, the deep tones mournful, he tried to tell her. "I was lonely and lost," he said. "Earth was a vast emptiness, and heaven far off. I was friendly at first, I wanted to talk to everyone—"

"How did you know the language?" Martha interrupted.

"I know all languages," he told her simply, then went on. "When I discovered I was invisible—my punishment seemed greater than I could bear. Then you came with your father."

"You were here then?"

"Yes. I landed first in your wood. It began to seem like home. I took several trips away, but always returned." He leaned over to kiss her. "If you could know the loneliness. I followed crowds, but learned it was not good to speak."

"You could have had fun," she smiled impishly.

"And scare people half to death?" His voice swelled a minute, then softened. "That is not my idea of fun."

"When did you first see me?"

"The day you returned from Europe. I was under the big tree in the front yard. There was something different about your face, as if you were not quite of this earth, as if you too were lost and homeless."

"I was," Martha said. "I was."

"I wanted to speak then." She leaned against him, felt the steady pounding of his heart. "I didn't know if I would ever dare," he went on, "then your father died and you were so alone. Well—I One night I could bear it no longer. I kissed you. If you had been afraid I would have let you think it a dream."

"So glad," she whispered. "So glad that you didn't."

Once, as they listened to the radio he began to sing. Martha turned the dial. She knew that his speaking voice was the most beautiful sound on earth, she had thought of the "Tongues of men and angels," Now she wondered if angel voices were as sweet as the song of Maris.

When he knew her delight, he sang often. "Sing one of your songs," she told him one day. And he sang.

She wept and asked him to stop.

"Why?" he asked.

"It is too beautiful," she said. "I cannot bear it."

"Nor can I," his voice choked.

She asked about his religion. "It is not of earth," he evaded. "We are not related to Adam."

"You believe in Christ though?"

"Believe? I know that He is. When the earth was created, He was there. When the morning stars sang together with joy. He IS the morning star."

Another time as she wrote some letters he picked up a pencil and idly sketched her profile. It was exactly like her. Martha exploded in excitement. "Maris!" she cried. "Maris. Can you see yourself in the mirror?"

"Of course."

Tears filled her eyes and ran down her cheeks, but she smiled. "You can make a picture for me. I know every line of your face but I want to see it."

With a few, rapid strokes he sketched a smooth, broad forehead, a thin nose, firm lips and rather sharp chin. Martha leaned against his shoulder. With her finger she traced his nose and lips. "You're beautiful," she whispered. "I'm so happy. Now I want a portrait. You never told me the color of your hair and eyes. I want to see you as you are."

She walked to the village for canvas and paints. Coming out of a store she met Dr. Glengarry. "Going in for art?" he smiled.

"Yes," she returned his smile, then her face sobered. "I—Doctor, would you call again in a few days?"

"More ghosts?" he asked. "I have wondered, you know."

"Yes," her eyes were strange. "Yes."

"DO NOT watch me, please," Maris said as he squeezed some green paint on the palette.

A few hours later Martha looked up to see spots of color coming through the air. "Maris?" she was breathless.

"Yes?" the color reached towards her.

"You have paint on your hands?"

"Yes," he seemed excited.

For three days he worked on the picture. When he rested, he sat with Martha, his voice happy, gayer than it had ever been. Finally, he led Martha into the bedroom with the large mirror. She walked slowly up to the picture. "Maris?" she whispered. "Maris? Is this you?"

"Do I please you?" he asked fearfully.

"It's impossible!"

"Then I am too strange?"

"No. Too beautiful."

His hair was thick and green as the richest moss. His brows and lashes a darker, richer green. His skin the exact, translucent pink of the inside of a seashell.

The large, sad eyes were a deep gray. His fingernails a rich pink, his lips bright coral. He wore a vest-like, sleeveless garment of a glossy, dark green, and tight, kneelength breeches of the same material. Brown, suede-like sandals were on his feet. He was perfectly proportioned and incredibly, fantastically beautiful.

"Are there other beings like you?"

"Many."

"Have you a sweetheart?"

"You," he kissed her.

Doctor Glengarry came that night. He was smiling and happy when he arrived. "Well?" he looked at Martha.

"Doctor—" in spite of herself, her face crimsoned. "I—Will you keep a secret?"

"What do you mean?" His eyes stilled.

Martha looked courageously at him. "I am with child," she said.

The doctor's face slowly became expressionless. "I—see," he said. But his voice was bewildered, as if he didn't see at all.

Martha looked at him with proud eyes.

"Who is he?" the doctor asked at last, and his voice shook. "I wouldn't have believed it," he muttered.

"It's not what you think. We made our vows before higher than earthly courts."

"So have other foolish girls." His voice was harsh.

"I've no one but you, and you must not tell." Martha held out her hand.

"That's asking a lot."

"It's not what you think. Believe me," Martha's voice trembled.

He regarded her a long time. The tenseness in his face eased. "I believe you," he said.

"This house is inhabited," Martha told him then. "With a being from another world. No priest or preacher would marry us. Maris is his name."

"You mean another virgin birth?" The doctor looked at her as if he feared for her reason.

"Oh no." Martha blushed. "Maris is real, only—he is invisible."

"Martha," he said gently, "you are mad."

"I'll handle this darling," Maris said. Then, "I am he. I am Maris."

"Where are you?" The doctor whirled.

"Here," Maris said. "Touch me. I do exist."

THE doctor reached his hands. Outlined a face, nose and chin, then dropped them to his side. "Now *I* am crazy," he said.

"No!" Maris said. "Believe me, no."

"But it's impossible!"

"Nothing's impossible," Maris told him.

"You see," Martha was crying softly. "You see."

"Yes," slowly. "It is impossible but true. Tell me."

They even showed him the picture.

He grew excited. "Let's tell the world," he said. "It will be a wonderful discovery."

"No!" Maris' voice rang through the room.

"Why?"

"The world is not ready yet."

"I think I shall tell anyhow."

"I cannot permit that."

"How can you help it?" then the doctor's face paled. "But of course. I cannot see you. You could kill me."

"We do not kill," Maris' voice was sad but gentle. "I would harm no one."

"Then how? Without violence, how?"

"There are other ways."

"I never knew them."

"No one would believe you."

"Some might."

Maris' voice had been gentle, now it swelled, was filled with awful, compelling power. "You—must—not!" he said. And

Martha knew, the doctor wouldn't. He COULDN'T!

MARIS suddenly grew interested in cosmetics. He fingered Martha's lipstick, powder-base, mascara.

As Martha rested alone one afternoon, she heard a noise, looked up and caught her breath. A tall, queer-looking stranger stood in the door. He wore a blue silk turban, a thin, gray sweater, brown pants, very short ones, above blue socks. Dark glasses hid his eyes. His skin glowed, a pale, almost transparent rose.

It was not human flesh. She had never seen any like it, but the muscles that bulged under the sweater were like—the picture—of Maris! The turban was her own blue scarf, the sweater had belonged to her father!

"Maris!" Martha was laughing and crying in his arms. "Why didn't I think of it?"

"So glad." She touched his odd skin. "How did you manage your teeth?" She looked at the pale, transparent pink of them as he smiled.

"Mercurochrome." He continued to smile.

"I could ask for nothing more now."

"I could." His lips drooped slightly.

"What?"

"That you might go with me when I return."

"When?" Martha caught her breath.

"If I return." He pulled her head against his chest.

ONE bright, November day she went hunting. Maris took her gun, examined it, but asked no questions. The fields were bright and cold, gaudy with color.

Maris' walk was like music. He never stumbled, but sped through the fields. His muscles rippled under the sweater, his chest rose gently and fell. "Everything is beautiful," he said once.

"As beautiful as your home?" Martha asked.

"Oh no!" His lips were sad.

They stumbled on a covey of birds. Martha, excited, shot three before they escaped.

Before she picked them up she knew Maris' anger. It shot from his body, bulged in his muscles, his nose seemed thinner, sharper, his lips straight, stern. He snatched the gun from her. She watched horrified as he bent the barrel.

Gently he picked up the slain birds. "Poor beauties," he said. "Poor sacrifice for man's pleasure." He turned to Martha. "Did you enjoy that?" His voice could not sound harsh. It did not possess those tones, but it swelled like thunder.

"I—I thought I did, but I won't any more," she whispered.

"Of course not, darling." He was all tenderness again. "For a minute I forgot that you were human."

Martha studied over his remark all the way home. In the library she turned to him abruptly. "Being human," she said, "we need help. You have knowledge, power. Your world is good and strong. Why don't you help us, save us from this—this—" She motioned to the headlines of the morning paper.

"That is not for us to do." His voice was as near harshness as was possible with him. "Man—man must save himself or he is doomed. Headed arrow straight for perdition."

"Tell me," Martha shivered fearfully. "What will he do?"

"Prophecy," his voice was still strained, "is not in my line. But look around you. Read your papers—Oh God!" he choked. "Why will they do it? You have given them this planet, this beautiful place, Given them feeling, beauty, intellect. Gave them soft, mortal bodies. Bodies that know hunger and pain. Love and fear. They could live and yet—they destroy each other."

"Maris! What can we do?"

"Nothing," he said. "I can do nothing. But if I were a man—"

"Then what?"

"The earth is hungry."

"But how? We are one country only. Could we grow food for the whole earth? Where is there room?"

"Look at your deserts."

"There's no water."

"You have rivers. The Mississippi alone—think of her floods."

"A thousand miles from the deserts."

"Why do you have engineers?"

"But the cost. It would take billions."

"What do wars cost? What price destruction?"

"I—I know. But what can I do?"

"Nothing," he became gentle. "You can do nothing." He was silent awhile, brooding. Then abruptly he said. "I am forgiven Martha. I may return home."

Martha felt that death entered her room and took her in his arms. She was silent.

"Do you wish me to go?" Maris asked at last.

"I—I wish your happiness."

"You are my happiness. I stay with you."

"But I can't let you. If we perish, then you too—"

"You doubt my love then?"

"Oh no!"

"Never say that again! I will never leave you. Never!"

"But your home. You love it."

"You will not be there." His voice was almost fierce, then gentled again. "Darling," his lips were tender, smiling. "If I had wings to return, I would tear them from my shoulders before I would leave you."

ONE cold, rainy day in late January Martha called Doctor Glengarry. "I need you," she said.

Soon he was in the room, his face damp from the rain. Maris was with them, gentle and kind. The doctor was kind, and nature, too. Swift, business-like pains that in a little while ceased and there was the gentle wail of a child.

"This is impossible!" The doctor's voice was stunned. "The child is part human!"

"She is like me," Maris said. "Exactly." His voice lamented as it had over the slain birds.

"What is it?" Martha asked. "What is wrong Maris?"

He laid it in her arms. A surge of great love overwhelmed her as she felt the soft flesh. It nuzzled her face, then turned from her and began its soft wailing again.

"She must die," Maris said. The music of his voice muted and sad.

"Why?" Martha was horrified.

"There is no earthly food for babies. And the air will not do for an infant." He was holding the child, crooning to it. "But it is best," he said. "What life could it have on earth?"

"Then the earth—Then you know—" Martha choked. She listened as the wails grew weaker. "It shall not die!" she said suddenly. Her voice strong.

"What do you mean?"

"You must take it home." She hesitated. "But will they receive it?"

"It's paternity is there," he said gently. "But I can't leave you, Martha!" His voice was agonized. "I had rather die."

"Our child must live."

"I can't leave you. I will have nothing."

"You can, Maris." She touched his face, smiled. "You must."

"I—know," he agreed at last. "I must, but can I?" He was silent awhile. The infant's cries grew weaker.

"Is she dying?" Martha asked, her hands touching a little cheek, then feeling weak, baby fingers curling over her thumb.

"Yes," Maris admitted.

"As you love me," Martha closed her eyes, her hand tight over a small hand. My baby, she thought. Oh God! my baby! She opened her eyes then. "You must go!" she said.

"As I love you," Maris groaned. Then he was conversing with someone in strange, wonderful language. "They will come soon," he said to Martha.

At the last she clung to him. "I will see you again?" she whispered. But one hand still held the small hand beside her.

"If God wills."

THERE was a swift, bright light outside. "I will love you through eternity," Maris kissed her. She released the little hand, and he was gone.

"Let me die," Martha whispered then. "Doctor, please let me die."

Gently, he gave her a hypodermic, and sat by her bed until she fell asleep.

Perhaps she dreamed it. But a few hours later she felt a presence and opened her eyes. There was Maris in all of his beauty. No cold picture now. No thin, transparent make-up, but living tissues. There were his sweet lips, his teeth and most of all, his eyes. His eyes full of love and joy. His living, breathing, physical being.

"How?" She was bewildered. "I can see you, Maris, am I dreaming?"

"No, darling." It was his voice. His very presence.

"But why are you here?"

"I have come for you."

"You mean—?"

"They found you worthy."

"How?" she wanted to know. "How is that I see you?"

"There are rays that humans wear," he said. "We have now created those rays."

"Then you mean—to help earth?" She was all human again. "You could save us," she pleaded. "You alone, Maris, with your knowledge, your power—"

"Man," he told her gently, "man rules his own destiny."

"Then earth must perish?"

"Man has ever conquered," he smiled. "He is only lower than the angels you know. Always there has been someone."

"Then even now?"

"Do you wish to go with me?" His smile was wonderful, understanding. "This *is* your home. I know."

"With you is my home," she said. "With you and my baby."

His face lighted. "Shall we go?"

"I am ready."

He took her in his arms, ran with her across the yard and placed her in a glittering object.

There was a bright, swift light. A roar, and then they were moving through space.

The world of thought and imagination and intuition,
being unknown was therefore non-existent

The Eighth Green Man

BY G. G. PENDARVES

I

"DANGEROUS road, huh!" Nicholas Birkett slowed down and frowned at the battered old sign-post. "I'll take a chance anyhow!"

"I should try another road," I said abruptly.

"But this one leads right down to the valley, and will save at least ten miles round."

"It's a dangerous road—very dangerous," I answered, with the conviction growing fast within me that the sign-post gave only a faint inkling of the deadly peril it guarded.

Birkett stared at me, his big brown hands resting on the steering-wheel. "What d'ye know about the road, anyhow?" he asked, his round blue eyes blank with amazement. "You've never been this way in your life before!"

I hesitated. My name is famous in more than one continent as that of an explorer, and I had recently achieved an expedition across the Sahara Desert which had added immensely to my fame. In fact, it was my lecture on this expedition, given in New York, that had brought about my friendship with Nicholas Birkett. He had introduced himself and carried me off for a stay with him at his country estate in Connecticut, in a whirlwind of enthusiastic interest and admiration.

How could I make my companion understand the shuddering fear that gripped me? I—Raoul Suliman d'Abre—to whom the face of Death was as familiar as my own.

But it was not Death that confronted us on that road marked "Dangerous" . . . something far less kind and merciful!

Not for nothing am I the son of a French soldier and an Arab woman! Not for nothing was I born in Algeria and grew up amidst the mysteries and magic of Africa. Not for nothing have I learnt in pain and terror that the walls of this visible world are frail and thin—too frail, too thin, alas! For there are times—there are places when the barrier is broken . . . when monstrous unspeakable Evil enters and dwells familiarly amongst us!

Heading by E. E. Cleland

"Well!" My companion grew impatient, and began to move the car's nose toward the road on our left.

"I'm sorry," I answered. "The truth is . . . it's a bit difficult to explain . . . but I have my reasons—very strong reasons—for not wishing to go down this particular road. I know—don't ask me how—that it's horribly dangerous. It would be a madness—a sin to take that way!"

"But look here, old chap, you can't mean that you . . . that . . . that you're only imagining things about it?"

His face was quite laughable in its astonishment.

I was frightfully embarrassed. How explain to such a rank materialist as Nicholas Birkett that instinct alone warned me against that road? How make a man so insensitive and practical believe in any danger he could not see or handle? He believed in neither God nor Devil! He had only a passionate belief in himself, his wealth, his business acumen, and above all, the physical perfection that went to make his life easy and pleasant.

"There are so many things you do not understand," I said slowly. "I am too old a campaigner to be ashamed of acknowledging that there are some dangers I think it foolhardy to face. This road is one of them!"

"But what in thunder do you know of the damned road?" Birkett's big fresh-colored face turned a brick-red in his angry impatience. Then he cooled down suddenly and put a heavy hand on my knee. "You're ill, old chap! Touch of malaria, I suppose! Excuse my being so darned hasty!"

I shook my head. "You won't or can't understand me! The truth is that I feel the strongest aversion from that path, and I beg you not to take it."

Birkett looked me in the eye and began to argue. He settled down to it solidly. I had nothing to back my arguments except my intuition, and such flimsy nothing as this he demolished with his big hearty laugh, and a heavy elephantine humor that reduced me to a helpless silence.

Opposition always narrowed Birkett down to one idea, that of proving himself right; and at last I said, "This is more dangerous for you than for me I am prepared . . . I know how to guard myself from attack, but you—"

"That settles it," he interrupted, gripping the wheel and shooting forward with a jerk. "I can look after myself." His cheerful bellow echoed hollowly as the car dived into the leafy roadway under a branching archway of trees.

II

BIRKETT became more and more boisterous in his mirth as we sped along for the road continued smooth and virtually straight, descending in a gentle slope to the Naugatuck valley.

"Dangerous road!" he said, with a prolonged chuckle. "I'll bet a china orange to a monkey that sign means a good long drink. Look out for an innocent little roadhouse tucked away down here. Dangerous road! I suppose that's the latest way of advertising the stuff."

It was useless to remonstrate, but I noticed many things I didn't like along that broad leafy lane.

No living creature moved there—no bird sang—no stir of wings broke the silence of the listening trees—not even a fly moved across our path.

Behind us we had left a world of life, of movement and color. Here all was green and silent. The dark columns of the tree-trunks shut us in like the massive bars of a prison.

Shadows moved softly across the pale, dusty road ahead; shadows that clustered in strange groups about us; shadows not cast by cloud or sun or moving object in our path, for these shadows had no relation to things natural or human.

I knew them! I knew them, and shuddered to recognize their hateful presence.

"You're a queer fellow, d'Abre," my companion rallied me. "You'd waltz out on a camel to meet a horde of yelling, bloodthirsty ruffians in the desert, and thoroughly enjoy the game. Yet here, in a civilized country, you see danger in a peaceful hillside! You certainly are a wonder!"

"Imshallah!" I murmured under my breath. "It is more wonderful that man can be so blind!"

"Are you muttering curses?" Birkett

showed white teeth in a flashing grin at my discomfiture. "I suppose it's the Arab half of you that invents these ghosts and devils. Life in the desert must need a few imaginary excitements. But in this country it needs something more than imagination to produce a really lively sort of devil. Something with a good kick to it."

Suddenly, ahead of us, the trees began to thin out, and we caught a glimpse of a low white building to our left. Birkett was triumphant.

"What did I tell you?" he cried. "Here I am leading you straight to a perfectly good drink, and you sit there babbling of death and disaster!"

He stopped the car before a short flight of mossy steps; from the top of them we stood and looked at the house, glimmering palely in the dusky shade of many tall trees.

A flagged path led from where we stood to the house—a straight white path about fifty yards in length. On each side of it the tall, rank grass dotted with trees and shrubs, stretched back to the verge of the encroaching wood. And within this spacious, parklike enclosure the distant house looked dwarfed and mean—a sort of fungus sprouting at the foot of the stately trees.

Birkett, undeterred by the menacing gloom of the whole place, cupped his hands about his mouth and gave a joyful shout, which echoed and died into heavy silence once more.

"Not expecting visitors," he grinned. "This is a midnight joint, I'll wager. Come on!"

At that moment we saw a sign at our elbow—a freshly painted sign—the lettering in a vivid luminous green on a black ground. It said:

"THE SEVEN GREEN MEN."

III

"SEVEN GREEN MEN, hey! Don't see 'em," said Birkett, moving up the pathway. I followed, looking round intently, every nerve in me sending to my brain its warning thrill of naked, overwhelming terror crouching on every hand, ready to spring, ready to destroy us body and soul.

Then suddenly I saw them—and my heart gave a great leap in my body! They faced us as we approached the house, their grim silhouettes sharp and distinct against the white roadhouse behind.

The Seven Green Men!

"Gee!" said Birkett. "Will you look at those trees? Seven Green Men! What d'you think about that?"

In two stiff rows before the house they stood, each one cut and trimmed to the height of a tall man. Their foliage was dense and unlike that of any tree or shrub I had seen in all my wanderings. A few feet away, their overlapping leaves gave all the illusion of metal, and seven tall warriors seemed to stand in rank before us, their armor green with age and disuse.

Each figure faced the west, presenting its left side to us; each bared head was that of a man shaved to the scalp, each profile was cut with marvelous cunning, and each was distinct and characteristic; the one thing in common was the eyelid, which in every profile appeared closed in sleep.

And when I say sleep, I mean to say just that.

They could awaken, those Seven Green Men! They could awaken to life and action; their roots were not planted in the kindly earth, but thrust down deep into very hell itself.

"The Seven Green Men! Well, what d'you think of that for an idea?" And my companion planted his feet firmly apart, clasped his hands behind his broad back, and gazed in puzzled admiration at the trees. "Some gardener here, d'Abre! I'd like to have a word with him. Wonder if he'd come and do a bit of work for me. A few of these green fellows would look fine in my own place. Beats me how the faces are cut so differently; must need trimming every day! Yes, I'll say that's some gardener!"

I put my hand on his arm.

"Don't you—can't you see they're not just trees? Come away while there's time, Birkett." And I tried to draw him back from those cursed green men, who, even in sleep, seemed to be watching my resistance to them with sardonic interest. "This place is horrible . . . foul, I tell you!"

"I came for a drink, and if these green fellows can't produce it, I'll pull their

noses for them!" His laugh rang and echoed in that silent place. As it died, the door of the inn was opened quickly and a man stood on its threshold.

For a long moment the three of us stood looking at each other, and my blood turned to ice as I saw the great massive figure of the innkeeper. Most smooth and urbane he was, that smiling devil—most punctilious and deferential in manner as he summed us both up, gaged our characters, our powers of resistance, our usefulness to him in the vast scheme of his infernal design.

He came down the flagged path toward us, passing through the stiff, silent rank of the seven green men—four on one side of the path, three on the other.

"Good morning, sirs, good morning! How can I serve you?" His high, whispering voice was a shock; it seemed indecent issuing from that gigantic frame, and I saw from Birkett's quick frown that it grated on him too.

"If you've got a drink wet enough to quench my thirst, I'd be mighty glad," answered my friend, rather gruffly. "And about lunch . . . we might try what your green men can do for us!"

OUR host gave a long snickering laugh, and glanced back at the seven trees as though inviting them to share the joke.

He bowed repeatedly. "No doubt of that, sir! No doubt of that! If you'll come this way, we'll give you some of the best—the very best." His whisper broke on a high squeak. "Lunch will be served in ten minutes."

I put a desperate hand on Birkett's arm as he began to follow in the wake of the innkeeper.

"Not past them, not past them!" I urged in a low voice. "Look at them now!"

As we approached, the trees seemed to quiver and ripple as though some inner force stirred within their leafy forms, and from each lifted eyelid a sudden flickering glance gleamed and vanished.

Beneath my hand I felt Birkett's involuntary start, but he shook me off impatiently. "Go back, if you like, d'Abre! You'll get me imagining as crazy things as you do, soon." And he stalked on to the house.

IV

"ENTER, enter, sirs! My house is honored!"

Unaccountably, as we passed the threshold my horror gave place to a fierce determination to fight—to resist this monstrous swollen spider greedy to catch his human flies.

Power against power—knowledge against knowledge—I would fight while strength and wisdom remained in me.

I waved away the proffered drink.

"No, nothing to drink," I said, watching his smooth pale face pucker at this first check in the game.

"Surely, sir, you will drink! You will not refuse to pledge the luck of my house! You are a great man—a great leader of men, that is written in your eyes! It is a privilege to serve so distinguished a guest."

His obsequious whispers sickened me, and I gathered my resources inwardly to meet the assault he was making on my will.

When I refused not only to drink, but to taste a mouthful of the unique lunch provided, a sudden vicious anger flickered in his pale, cold eyes.

"I regret that my poor fare does not please you, sir," he said, his voice like the sound of dry leaves blown before a storm.

"It is better for me that I do not eat," I answered curtly, my eyes meeting his as our wills clashed.

For a long, terrible minute the world dropped from under me; existence narrowed down to those malicious eyes which held mine. I held on with all the desperation of a drowning man tossing in a dark sea of icy waters—torn, buffeted, despairing, at the mercy of incalculable power.

With hideous, intolerable effort I met the attack, and by the mercy of Allah I won at last; for the creature turned from me and smoothly covered his defeat by attending very solicitously to Birkett's needs.

I relaxed, sick and trembling with the price of victory.

I had fought many strange battles in my life: for in the East, the Unknown is a force to be recognized, not laughed at and despised as in the West. Yet of all my encounters, this one was the deadliest, this evil, smiling Thing the strongest I had known in any land of place.

Must Birkett's strength go to feed this insatiable foe who battened on the race of men?

I SHUDDERED as I watched him sitting there, eating, drinking, laughing with his host; his whole mind bent on the pleasure of the moment, his will relaxed, his brain asleep; while the creature at his side served him with hateful, smiling ease, watching with cool, complacent eye as his victim let down his barriers one by one.

In his annoyance with my behavior, Birkett prolonged the meal as much as possible, ignoring me as I sat smoking and watching our host as intently as he watched us.

Anxiously I wondered what the next move in this horrible cat-and-mouse game would be; but it was not until Birkett rose from the table at last that the enemy showed his hand.

"It's a pity you can't be here on Friday night, sir! You'd be just the one to appreciate it. One of our gala nights—in fact the best night in the year at the Seven Green Men. You'd have a meal worth remembering that night. But I'm afraid they wouldn't let you in on it."

"Why not?" demanded Birkett, instantly aggressive.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but you see it's a very special night indeed. There's a very select society in this neighborhood; I don't suppose you've so much as heard of it: The Sons of Enoch."

"Never heard of 'em." Birkett's tone implied that had they been worth knowing, he would have heard of them. "Who are they? Those seven green chaps you keep in the grounds—eh?"

A cold light flashed in the innkeeper's eyes; and my own heart stood still, for the flippant remark had been nearer the truth than Birkett guessed.

"It's a society that was founded centuries ago, sir. Started in Germany in a little place on the Rhine, run by some old monks. There are members in every country in the world now. This one in America is the last one to be formed, but it's going strong, sir, very strong!"

"Then why the devil haven't I been told of it before?"

"Why should you know of all the hole-and-corner clubs that exist?" I interposed. The innkeeper was probing Birkett's weakest part. How well—oh, how truly the smiling, smooth-spoken devil had summed up my poor blundering friend!

"It'll be a society run for the Great Unwashed!" I continued. "You'd be a laughing stock in the neighborhood if it got out that you were mixed up with any sort of scum of that sort!"

"There is much that your great travels have not taught you, sir," answered the innkeeper, his sibilant speech savage as a snake's hiss. "The members of this club are those who stand so high, that as I said, I fear they would not consent to admit you even once to their company."

"Damn it all!" Birkett interrupted irritably. "I'd like to know any fellows out here who refuse to meet me. And who are you, curse you, to judge who can be members or not?"

Our host bowed, and I caught the mocking smile of his thin lips, as the fish rose so readily to his bait.

I poured ridicule on the proposition and did all I could do to turn Birkett aside, but to no avail. Opposition, as always, goaded him to incredible heights of obstinacy; and now, half drunk and wholly in the hands of that subtle devil who measured him so accurately, the poor fellow fairly galloped into the trap set for him.

It ended with a promise on our host's part to do all in his power to persuade the Sons of Enoch to receive Birkett and perhaps make his a member of their ancient society.

"Friday night then, sir! About 11 o'clock the meeting will start, and there's a midnight supper to follow. Of course I'll do my best for you, but I doubt if you'll be allowed to join."

"Don't worry," was Birkett's valedictory remark, "I'll become one of the Sons of Enoch on Friday, or I'll hound your rotten society out of existence. You'll see, my jolly old innkeeper, you'll see!"

And as we left the grounds, passing once more the Seven Green Men, their leaves rustled with a dry crackle that was the counterpart of the innkeeper's hateful, whispering voice.

V

OUR drive homeward was at first distinctly unpleasant. Birkett chose to take my behavior as a personal insult, and, being at a quarrelsome stage of his intoxication, he kept up a muttered commentary: ". . . insulting a decent old bird like that . . . best lunch ever had . . . damned if I won't . . . Sons of Enoch . . . what's going to stop me . . . be a Son of Enoch . . . damned interfering fellow, d'Abre! . . ."

He insisted on driving himself, and took such a roundabout way that it was two hours later when we saw New Haven in the distance. Birkett was sober by this time and rather ashamed of his treatment of a guest.

He insisted on pulling up at another little roadhouse, The Brown Owl, run by a New England farmer he wanted me to meet.

"You'll like the old chap, d'Abre!" he assured me, eager to make amends for his lapse. "He's a great old man, and can put up a decent meal. Come on, you must be starving."

I was thankful to make the acquaintance of both old Paxton and his fried chicken . . . and Birkett's restored geniality made me hopeful that after all he might not prove obdurate about repeating his visit to the Seven Green Men.

Old Paxton sat with us later on his porch, and gradually the talk veered round to our late excursion. The old farmer's face changed to a mask of horror.

"The Seven Green Men! Seven, did you say? My God! . . . oh, my God!"

My pulses leaped at the loathing and fear in his voice; and Birkett brought his tilted chair down on the floor with a crash. Staring hard at Paxton, he said aggressively, "That's what I said! Seven! It's a perfectly good number; lots of people think it's lucky."

But the farmer was blind and deaf to everything—his mind gripped by some paralyzing thought.

"Seven of them now . . . seven! And no one believed what I told 'em! Poor soul, whoever it is! Seven now. Seven Green Men in that accursed garden!"

He was so overcome that he just sat there, saying the same things over and over again.

Suddenly, however, he got to his feet and hobbled stiffy across the veranda, beckoning us to follow. He led us down the steps to his peach orchard behind the house, and pointing to a figure shambling about among the trees.

"See him . . . see him!" Paxton's voice was hoarse and shaken. "That's my only son, all that's left of him."

The awkward figure drew nearer, approaching us at a loping run, and Birkett and I instinctively drew back. It was an imbecile, a slobbering, revolting wreck of humanity with squinting eyes and loose mouth, and a big, heavy frame on which the massive head rolled sickeningly.

He fell at Paxton's feet, and the old man's shaking hand patted the rough head pressed against his knees.

"My only son, sirs!"

We were horribly abashed and afraid to look at old Paxton's working features.

"He was the Sixth Green Man . . . and may the Lord have mercy on his soul!"

The poor afflicted creature shambled off, and we went back to the house in silence.

Awkwardly avoiding the farmer's eye, Birkett paid the reckoning and started for his car, when Paxton laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"I see you don't believe me, sir! No one will believe! If they had done so, that house would be burnt to the ground, and those trees . . . those trees—those green devils with it! It's they who steal the soul out of a man, and leave him like my son!"

"Yes," I answered. "I understand what you mean."

Paxton peered with tear-dimmed eyes into my face.

"You understand! Then I tell you they're still at their fiend's game! My son was the Sixth . . . the Sixth of those Green Men! Now there are Seven! They're still at it!"

VI

"HOW about staying on here and having another swim when the moon rises?" I said, apparently absorbed in making my old briar pipe draw properly, but in

reality waiting with overwhelming anxiety for Birkett's reply.

It was Friday evening, and no word had passed between us during the week of the Seven Green Men, or Birkett's decision about tonight.

He was sitting there on the rocks at my side, his big body stretched out in the sun in lazy enjoyment, his half closed eyes fixed on the blue outline of Long Island on the opposite horizon.

"Well, how about it?" I repeated, after a long silence.

He rolled over regarding me mockingly.

"Anxious nurse skilfully tries to divert her charge from his naughty little plan! No use, d'Abre; I've made up my mind about tonight, and nothing's going to stop me."

I bit savagely on my pipe-stem, and frowned at an offending gull which wheeled to and fro over the lapping water at our feet.

As easily could six-months-old baby digest and assimilate raw meat as could Birkett's intellect grasp anything save the obvious; nevertheless I was impelled to make another attempt to break down the ramparts of his self-sufficient obstinacy.

But I failed, of course. The world of thought and imagination and intuition was unknown and therefore non-existent to him. The idea of any form of life, not classified and labeled, not belonging to the animal or vegetable kingdom, was simply a joke to him.

And old Paxton's outbursts he dismissed as lightly as the rest of my arguments.

"My dear chap, everyone knows the poor old fellow's half mad himself with trouble. The boy was a wild harum-scarum creature always in mischief and difficulties. No doubt he did go to a midnight supper at the Seven Green Men. But what's that got to do with it? You might as well say if you got sunstroke, for instance, that old Paxton's fried chicken caused it!"

VII

"YOU don't mean to say that you're coming too?" asked Birkett, when, about 10:30 that night, I followed him out of doors to his waiting car.

"But of course!" I answered lightly. "You don't put me down as a coward as well as a believer in fairy-tales, do you?"

"You're a sport, anyhow, d'Abre!" he said warmly. "And I'm very glad you're coming to see for yourself what one of our midnight joints is like. It'll be a new experience for you.

"And for you," I said under my breath, as he started the engine and passed out from his dim-perfumed garden to the dusty white highroad beyond.

A full moon sailed serenely among silvery banks of cloud above us; and in the quiet night river and valley, rocky hillside and dense forest had the sharp, strange outlines of a woodcut.

All too soon we reached the warning sign, "Dangerous Road," and passed from a silver, sleeping earth to the stagnant gloom of that tunnellike highway.

But hateful as it was, I could have wished that road would never end, rather than bring us, as inevitably it did, to that ominous green-and-black sign of our destination.

The sound of a deep rhythmic chant greeted us as we went up the steps, and we saw that the roadhouse was lit from end to end. Not with the mellow, welcoming radiance of lamp or candle, but with strange quivering fires of blue and green, which flickered to and fro in mad haste past every window of the inn.

"Some illumination!" remarked Birkett. "Looks like the real thing to me! Do you hear the Sons of Enoch practising their nursery rhymes! Coming, boys!" he roared cheerfully. "I'll join in the chorus!"

As for myself, I could only stare at the moonlit garden in horror, for my worst fears were realized, and I knew just how much I had dreaded this moment when I saw that the seven tall trees—those sinister deviltrees—were gone!

Then I turned, to see the huge bulk of the innkeeper close behind us, his head thrown back in silent laughter, his eyes smoldering fires above the ugly, cavernous mouth.

Birkett turned too, at my exclamation, and drew his heavy eyebrows together in a frown.

"What the devil do you mean by creeping up to us like that?" he demanded angrily.

Still laughing, the inkeeper came forward and put his hand familiarly on my friend's arm. "By the Black Goat of Zarem," he muttered, "you are come in a good hour. The Sons of Enoch wait to receive you—I myself have seen to it—and tonight you shall both learn the high mysteries of their ancient order!"

"Look here, my fine fellow," said Birkett, "what the deuce do you mean by crowing so loud? I've got to meet these queer minstrels of yours before I decide to join them."

From the house came a great rolling burst of song, a tremendous chant with an earth-shaking rhythm that was like the shock of battle. The ground rocked beneath us; gathering clouds shut out the face of the watchful moon; a sudden fury of wind shook the massed trees about the house and grounds until they moaned and hissed like lost souls, tossing their crests in impotent agony.

In the lull which followed, Birkett's voice came to me, low and strangely subdued: "You're right, d'Arbe! This place is unhealthful. Let's quit." And he moved back toward the steps.

But the creature at our side laughed again and raised his hand. Instantly the grounds were full of shifting lights, moving about us—hemming us in, revealing dim outlines of swollen, monstrous bodies, and bloated features which thrust forward sickeningly to gloat and peer at Birkett and me.

The former's shuddering disgust brought them closer and closer upon us, and I whispered hastily, "Face them! Face them! Stamp on them if you can, they only advance as you retreat!"

Our host's pale, smiling face darkened as he saw our resolution, and a wave of his hand reduced the garden to empty darkness once more.

"So!" he hissed. "I regret that my efforts to amuse you are not appreciated. If I had thought you a coward"—turning to Birkett—"I would not have suggested that you come tonight. The Sons of Enoch have no room for a coward in their midst!"

"Coward!" Birkett's voice rose to a bellow at the insult, and in reaction from his horror. "Why, you grinning white-faced ape! Say that again and I'll smash you until you're uglier than your filthy friends here. No more of your conjuring tricks! Get on to the house and show me these precious Sons of yours!"

I put my hand on his arm, but the blind anger to which the innkeeper had purposely roused him made him incapable of thought or reason, and he shook me off angrily.

Poor Birkett! Ignorant, undisciplined, and entirely at the mercy of his appetites and emotions—what chance had he in his fatuous immaturity against our enemy? I followed him despairingly. His last chance of escape was gone if he entered that house of his own free will.

"The trees are gone!" I said in a loud voice, pulling Birkett back, and pointing. "Ask him where the trees are gone!"

But as I spoke, the outlines of the Seven Green Men rose quivering in the dimness of the garden. Unsubstantial, unreal, more shadows cast by the magic of the Master who walked by our side, they stood there again in their stiff, silent ranks!

"What the deuce are you talking about?" growled Birkett. "Come on! I'll see this thing through now, if I'm hanged for it."

I caught the quick malice of the innkeeper's glance, and shivered. Birkett was a lump of dough for this fiend's molding, and my blood ran cold at the thought of the ordeal to come.

VIII

OVER the threshold of the house! . . . and with one step we passed the last barrier between ourselves and the unseen.

No familiar walls stood around us, no roof above us. We were in the vast outer darkness which knows neither time nor space.

I drew an Arab knife from its sheath—a blade sharpened on the sacred stone of the Kaaba, and more potent here than all the weapons in an arsenal.

Birkett took my wrists in his big grasp and pointed vehemently with his other hand. In any other place I could have smiled at his bewilderment; now, I could only wish with intense bitterness that his intellect equaled his obstinacy. Even now he discredited his higher instincts; even here he was trying to measure the vast spaces of eternity with his little foot-rule of earth-bound dimensions.

Our host stood before us—smiling, urbane as ever; and, at his side the Seven Green Men towered, bareheaded and armorclad, confronting us in ominous silence, their eyes devouring hells of sick desire!

"My brothers!" At the whispered word, Birkett stiffened at my side and his grip on my arm tightened.

"My brothers, the Sons of Enoch, wait to receive you to their fellowship. You shall be initiated as they have been. You shall share their secrets, their sufferings, their toil. You have come here of your own free will . . . now you shall know no will but mine. Your existence shall be my existence! Your being my being! Your strength my strength! What is the Word?"

The Seven Green Men turned toward him.

"The Word is thy Will, Master of Life and Death!"

"Receive, then, the baptism of the initiate!" came the whispered command.

Birkett made a stiff step forward, but I restrained him with frantic hands.

"No! No!" I cried hoarsely. "Resist . . . resist him."

He smiled vacantly at me, then turned his glazed eyes in the direction of the whispering voice again.

"No faith defends you . . . no knowledge guides you . . . no wisdom inspires you. Son of Enoch, receive your baptism!"

I drew my dagger and flung myself in front of Birkett as he brushed hastily past me and advanced toward the smiling Master. But the Seven Green Men ringed us in, stretching out stiff arms in a wide circle, machinelike, obedient to the hissing commands of their superior.

I leapt forward, and with a cutting slash of my knife got free and strode up to the devil who smiled, and smiled, and smiled!

"Power is mine!" I said, steadying my voice with hideous effort. "I know you. . . . I name you. . . . Gaffarel!"

IX

IN THE gray chill of dawn I stood once more before the house of the Seven Green Men. The dark woods waited silent and watchful, and the house itself was shuttered, and barred, and silent too.

I looked around wildly as thought and memory returned. Birkett . . . Birkett, where was he?

Then I saw the trees! The deviltrees, stiff, grotesque and menacing in their armor, silhouetted against the white, blank face of the roadhouse behind.

The Seven Green Men!

Seven . . . no . . . there were eight men now! I counted them! My voice broke with a cry as I counted and recounted those frightful trees.

Eight!

As I stood there sobbing the words . . . eight . . . eight . . . eight over and over, with terror mounting in my brain, the narrow door of the inn opened slowly, and a figure shambled out and down the path toward me.

A big, heavy figure that mouthed and gibbered at me as it came, pouring out a stream of meaningless words until it reached my feet, where it collapsed in the long dewy grass.

It was Birkett—Nicholas Birkett! I recognized the horrible travesty of my friend at last, and crept away from him into the forest, for I was very sick.

The sign was freshly painted as we passed it coming out, much later, for it was long before I could bring myself to touch Birkett, and take him out to the waiting car.

The sign was freshly painted as we passed . . . and the livid green words ran:

"THE EIGHT GREEN MEN."

She Wore a Black Rose

BY FREDERICK SANDERS

" 'Tis death ye ride wi' arl time ye pithers wi' they devil's own blossoms!"

INSIDE the private bar of the ancient hostelry, "The Black Horse," at Firley Village, all was warmth, light and goodwill. Out-of-doors, the countryside lay flooded beneath the silvery brightness of an almost full moon; a heavy frost sparkled on grass, trees and roof tops. The strange stillness of the old village street awoke to life, as the clock on the church tower of St. Nicholas struck the hour of nine, on one of the most seasonable Christmas Eves that Firley had enjoyed for many a year.

The "private bar" of the "The Black Horse" was really the comfortable living-room of its host, where the notables of the village gathered nightly, all the year round, year by year. Mr. Clodd, the schoolmaster; old Eli Task, the biggest farmer in the district and deacon of the "Queer People," a religious sect of rigid Biblical beliefs.

There was Mr. Downgate, the agricultural engineer, Capt. Silver, of "Grayholme," and Josiah Cork, manager of the village stores; and, to complete the party, Tom Barton, a giant of a young man, eldest son of Firley's squire. At twenty-five he was still called, by one and all, Master Tom.

This tale is of Tom Barton (may his soul rest in peace). Barton's hobby was rose-growing, and his one aim in life was to perfect a black rose. On this particular eve of Christmas he wore, as was his every-day practice, a rose buttonhole.

Roses bloomed in his famous hot-house all the year round; in the experimental hot-house grew and blossomed marvellous roses, ranging from deep scarlet to what would appear, to the layman, black. But not quite black; Barton had on one or two occasions thought his goal reached, only to find, on strict analysis, that the unreal looking blooms were of an exceptionally deep mauve.

"AGEN CREATION"

JOSIAH remarked upon the fine rose fixed in the lapel of Master Burton's sports tweed. The old schoolmaster and the engineer praised its loveliness. Old Eli said that it was ". . . agen the true creation o' t' Lord Most High, and sarch as yew would, arl t' wur'rld, fill nor fall, yew'd never find one o' they Satanic flow'rs, sure'lye!"

Captain Silver, who held the undisputed position of parish historian, said to young Barton that he was not the first person in Firley's long history to take to rose-growing as a hobby and the evolving of a black rose.

The company immediately scented a yarn from the captain and glasses were re-filled and pipes re-stocked and lit.

"Let's have it, Captain!" enthused Barton, and so the ex-army gentleman launched forth with the following story.

According to an old legend—related the self-appointed rural historian—back in the sixteenth century, the beautiful wife of the then lord of the manor, Sir William Dorl, had been a great lover of flowers, particularly of roses, and for many years she

had worked hard at trying to evolve a black rose.

In a small building, studded with windows, and with windows let into the roof, which stood in the marvelous gardens of the mansion, Lady Dorl grew her wonderful roses and carried out her experiments with them.

TRAGEDY

ON CHRISTMAS EVE of the year 1569, she carried out her final tests upon two large blooms, and passed verdict on one of them as being black. Elated, she ran from the hot-house, across the gardens, to the steps of the terrace leading up to the front of the mansion.

In her haste and excitement running to tell her husband of her success, she tripped, and falling heavily, crashed her head upon the bottom step of the wide stone terrace stairway.

She was found by one of the servants who stumbled over her prostrate form in the darkness, was taken indoors, and a few hours later passed away from a cerebral hemorrhage.

Her husband went nearly crazy with grief over the sad end of his young and beautiful wife. But he could not realize her as dead, and had a special coffin made which, after the Lady Dorl, dressed in her most becoming costume, and with the fatal black rose pinned to her bosom, had been laid in it, was made air-tight and sealed with twenty-six seals, replicas of roses, being a seal for each year of her age.

The coffin was finally borne by the gardening staff down the avenue of elms from the mansion to the old church, where the grief-stricken widower saw his beloved wife finally laid to rest in the family vault of the Dorls in the centre of the graveyard.

The great gray slab of stone, giving access to the vault, was put back into its place by four of the staff and the sorrowing baronet went away, leaving the mortal remains of his lady in the cold dank atmosphere of death, asleep with the long dead generations of the Dorls.

Thus ended the captain's tale. Tom Barton's eyes were twinkling as he remarked that the Lady Dorl might well have been his soul-mate, and, said he, if she was still as beautiful this Christmas Eve in her air-tight coffin as when she was laid to rest that Christmastide, over four hundred and fifty years ago, he'd be bound if he would not break every rose seal and raise the coffin lid to kiss the fair, cool lips of Lady Dorl, and see for himself the black rose pinned upon her breast.

All smiled at Master Tom's exuberance of mind, but old Eli could not see that Barton only jested. "Ye speak blasphemy, young man!" angrily cried Eli. " 'Tis the poor dead ye'd be a' kissen; a openin' coffins for t' see your flowers o' Satan. 'Twas heaven's wrath that descended upon yon fair woman in t' old vault, for a'fering with t' good Lord's creation! Mark thee well. Mairster Tom Barton, 'tis death ye ride wi' arl time ye pithers wi' they devil's own blossoms! 'Taint nat'ral, boy, 'taint nat'ral."

DEATH THE JESTER

BARTON laughed and jested further with old Eli, saying that a warm kiss on such a cold night might wake the life within the long still heart. Here Eli got up, and stamping to the door in his anger went outside, and away home, but not before giving a final warning to the laughing squire's son.

" 'Tis Death ye would play wi' but Death is *the* Jester, Mairster Barton, sure-lye! Ye cry aloud with your sinning lips for the wrath to visit ye, and by arl that's holy, 'twill come t' ye lad, 'twill come t' ye wi'out warnin'!"

Soon after Eli's going the landlord blew his little silver whistle and "Time, gentlemen, please!" warned all that ten o'clock was near. The small party broke up and each went home his own particular way. Tom Barton's way, a short cut, lay through the old churchyard.

That night Tom Barton did not return home. His family were not particularly perturbed, for it was not the first time that he had failed to come home, having at times gone to a friend's house at a minute's invitation, to stay the night. But the next day consternation and dread reigned supreme in Squire Barton's house. Tom had been found that very morning wandering

in the Ten Acre Meadow, part of the property of Farmer Stile, of Honeysuckle Farm. Wandering in circles, naked—except for his boots, socks and suspenders—bereft of speech and sanity. Mad! An imbecile; a speechless madman!

That evening poor Tom Barton reposed in a little room at an exclusive private mental hospital in a far-away corner of the county. The cause of madness, according to the mental specialists was shock; something beyond any sort of natural shock.

Diligent search around the village brought Tom's apparel to light; his hat and jacket in the churchyard; pullover, gloves, collar and torn tie at different distances along Plumtree Lane which led to the four-went-way or cross-roads; the trousers, braces and vest at intervals down the old Forestway road; in a field near Bramble Farm his pants, from which point he had evidently been wandering nearly two miles over fields to Ten Acre Meadow, where he was found.

Two years went by, during which period Captain Silver, who happened to be an old friend of Dr. Stark, the head of the nursing staff of the private mental hospital in which Tom Barton spent his days, would motor over to the hospital to see Tom and discuss his strange case with the doctor.

Tom remained the same, month after month. He gave no trouble. He was pathetically docile and obedient. A classic patient in a little world of disordered minds. Gradually Tom became restless. He tried to speak, but no sound would pass his lips. By way of signs he was able at last to make the doctor understand he wanted to write.

He was given pencil and paper and left to himself at the little table in his room.

MEANINGLESS WORDS

DAY after day Barton would sit at the table, scribbling away. Every day the papers would be collected from him and he would stand mutely by while the doctor scanned them, and listen to the words of praise at his efforts from Doctor Stark.

Mostly the manuscripts contained only a jumble of meaningless words and scrawls. But the word "roses" occurred dozens of times and here and there crude little drawings of what appeared to be those flowers.

Then, one day, Master Tom came home. Came home in an oak coffin with his name, age, birth and death dates engraved upon a large silver rose screwed upon the lid of his little wooden house. He was buried in the old churchyard of the church of St. Nicholas, and, it being midsummer, everyone sent wreaths and crosses and bunches of roses for his grave.

The cause of death had been heart failure due to a sudden shock. Doctor Stark came to the funeral. Afterwards he and Captain Silver sat discussing Tom, his madness, his sudden death. The doctor returned to the hospital accompanied by the captain. Once there the peculiar manuscripts written by Tom Barton were handed to Captain Silver to read.

Slowly, painstakingly, the ex-soldier read them over; a hundred and thirty sheets of words, scribbles, scrawls and drawings. The captain found the word "rose" occurred 200 times; "roses," 158 times; "black," 42; "deep red," 30; "roses in a row," 39; "26 roses," 62; and over 100 crude little drawings of roses full front.

A CLUE

IT WAS the "26 roses" which gave him a clue.

The doctor and the captain made no move until several weeks after Tom Barton's funeral, then they repaired one dark night to the old graveyard, and made their way to where the old vault of the Dorls was situated.

Then they stood over the great gray slab of stone with its rusted centre lifting ring which gave, when removed, entrance to the steep steps leading down to the vault of the Dorl family.

"If your theory is correct, John, we shall discover why Tom Barton went mad," said the doctor quietly. "Shock caused his madness; shock caused his death. I know the cause of the death shock and what brought about his death *must* have brought about his madness in the first place. The evidence of that I have not yet shown you, but after our investigation here tonight and what facts we can glean from it, I shall," and as he spoke the doctor tapped his overcoat pocket.

It took the united efforts of the two men with their iron crowbars, wedges and wooden handspike to remove the heavy slab away from the entrance. The doctor remarked that it would have "taken a bull of a man to lift that stone alone." The two men went below. Once inside the vault, a large one, they went to work.

Scores of coffins of all sizes, in all kinds of stages of decay, lay neatly each in its own little recess. Tiers of little coffin-filled recesses all around them, and they sought but one. A coffin, if legend was true, with 26 seals upon its lid in the form of roses.

At last they found it, a coffin made of beaten light iron, beautifully riveted and the lid sealed with 26 seals in the shape of roses. The iron was flaked with rust; some of the seals had pieces broken away, but here, untouched for centuries it had lain, with all its seals still intact.

OLD ROSE PETALS

UPON the floor of the vault the eyes of the Captain noticed some shreds or minute rolls of black. In the light of the electric torches the pieces of blackish stuff were identified as old rose-petals. How old? Well, weeks, months, maybe years? These remnants of a dark red rose? A black rose? The atmosphere had kept them well.

The vault brooded over the secrets of the dead. The rusty iron coffin with the 26 seals in the form of roses in bloom lay mute and mysterious covered by the dust of four and a half centuries.

An hour after their visit to the old vault of the Dorls, the Doctor and Captain were seated in the study at "Greyholme" turning over the evidence of the strange affair of Tom Barton.

The Doctor was of the opinion that Tom, on the Christmas Eve two years before, had, while going through the churchyard, become obsessed with the desire to see if such a coffin really did exist in the Dorl vault as described, and that, by reason of his massive strength, he had pulled up the heavy slab to the entrance and gone down into the old vault.

There he had seen, or imagined he saw, something so unearthly as to shock him into madness. From the rose he wore in his buttonhole that night the petals had fallen while in the vault, where they had lain until found by the Captain.

That Tom, fleeing from the dread place, had found enough sense and a few seconds to spare to replace the large stone slab back into position before his senses fully left him, and had then wandered away.

The Captain was in full agreement with the Doctor's theory, but added that, if one could go by the theory of reincarnation, that maybe Barton was an embodiment of the long dead Lady Dorl's spirit mind; or was, perhaps, in another way, a sympathetic spirit in tune with Lady Dorl.

DOCUMENT OF DEATH

THE doctor, though not inclined to put invisible things before the evidence of hard facts, drew from his pocket a manuscript, which he handed to the Captain, saying as he did so that the papers constituted Tom Barton's last effort at writing.

"This manuscript," continued Doctor Stark, "caused poor Barton's death. His attempts at writing were indications that his mind was beginning to function more rationally; that his memory was returning. He regained his sanity long enough to record what happened to him on that Christmas Eve over two years ago.

"Yet from our evidence, the sealed coffin, the rose petals and the legend of Lady Dorl, we can draw more than one conclusion. So read this document of death, John, and, if I may say so, whatever your final conclusions may be, like mine, they are open to question. The verdict of what caused Tom's destruction must always remain an open one."

And this is the document, written in the private mental hospital, by the man whose sole hobby and aim in life has been the evolving of a black rose:

"I remember now! Yes; it is all coming back to me out of the blackness that has been my only companion all these long weary months! I remember the bright moonlight, the stars and the frost; the white path through the silent churchyard; remember walking over the old graves towards where the vault lay.

"Then I was standing over the great slab to the entrance to the vault beneath my feet. A terrible, though exultant fascination gripped me. I thought: 'Is the legend of the Black Rose true?'

"Then I had laid hold upon the iron ring of the stone and with my great strength hurled it aside and, by the light of the moon, had descended to the last home of the long dead Dorls.

"The coffin-lined vault was eerily still and lit up in ghostly fashion from the broad moonbeam which flooded down the stone steps into the underground chamber.

"I gazed, fascinated, around. How deathly was the peace of this place of the long forgotten dead of the ancient families of the Firley Dorls! Opposite to me, in its recess, three tiers up, I saw a coffin which, even in the pale moonlight of the place, spoke silently of skilled workmanship.

"I stepped up to it and, rapping upon it, found it to be of metal well flaked with the rust of many years. Looking at the coffin closer, I felt a sharp stab in my breast of sudden fright! The lid was sealed with the seals of blossoming roses!

"I counted them along one side. Thirteen in number. On the other side would be thirteen more! Twenty-six in all. One for each year of Lady Dorl's short life! 'It is true then,' I said to myself, 'she really lived, and was buried here.'

"Suddenly the stillness of the vault awoke to an echo! One of the seals had fallen off! More followed. The sounds were like footfalls made by falling rose seals.

"Then came a terrifying silence. Noiselessly the lid of the coffin was opening inch by inch. A pale, beautiful hand clutched hold of the edge of the coffin, then, the lid fell back with a noise like thunder as the echoes reverberated around the coffin stacked chamber.

THE BLACK ROSE

"THEN, from out of the iron case arose a woman's form, clothed in a long well-fitting dress of blood red. Her face was beautiful to behold. Around her slender white throat was a necklet of fine pearls, upon her bosom—fastened by a golden pin—a black rose! Then the glorious apparition stood before me, eyes shining with delight and love.

" 'LADY DORL!' my mind hammered at me, 'Lady Dorl!' Then her hands were upon my shoulders and she whispered 'Oh, William, you've come to me at last! The Black Rose—I have created it! Seal my success, my dear one, with your kiss!' She pulled my head gently down to her own. My mind hammered, 'William? William? Sir William Dorl?'

"Then my lips touched hers, not cold, but warm and soft, pulsing with life! I closed my eyes. Then, slowly I opened them, and—*found myself looking into the rotting face of a corpse!* Shreds of putrid skin curled upon the cheeks of it! Upon my lips were shreds—wisps of rotten flesh! The face changed from putrifying flesh to a lemon-colored chalk-like mask.

"The mask flaked away into dust. Dust dribbled from the eyeless sockets.

"I tried to turn, to run away, anywhere, from this ghastly form in front of me, but I was transfixed! I felt the rotten flesh upon my lips, but could not wipe it off, for my arms were paralysed! The lovely robe she wore, fell into tatters, became dust and disappeared before my shocked eyes.

"Before me stood a blackened figure, hideous in the extreme. Around its feet lay a bundle of gray hair from off the bony head. The dry black flesh was becoming dust.

"It trickled down to the floor with a sound like distant rain. The lower jaw fell to the floor; the grinning skull rolled forward and fell after it.

"Then with a clatter the whole structure, that had once been so fair and beautiful, fell apart and dropped down, throwing up a smother of dust. The dust that had once been Lady Dorl! . .

"It got into my eyes! It filtered into my nose! Found its way, grittily, into my mouth! I tried to move! Tried in my terrible agony of fear to scream!

"Suddenly something at the back of my head went numb, then leaped to life, turned over—turned over—turned over—"

(All the characters in the above story are fictitious and do not represent any living persons.)

by Garnett Radcliffe

Heading by Joseph Eberle

Voices more ferocious than the braying hounds rose from the darkness of the forest.

FELTON couldn't sleep. A booming sound was keeping him awake. He couldn't decide whether it was his own blood pounding in his ears, or if it came from the earth on which he lay. Perhaps, he thought, what I hear is Africa laughing. I've heard Africa called the Continent of Dark Laughter. She mocks white men because we're not her children.

He felt afraid. He was young and this was his first trip into what men called the "Land of No-Return." They called it that because so many expeditions had failed to return. They had been swallowed by Africa and no survivor had come back to tell what had happened.

The expedition of which Felton was a member was an attempt to solve the latest mystery. The latest, but actually it was almost five years since Dr. Luke, his three companions and his ten Hausse porters, had disappeared. Almost certainly they had been murdered by one of the pigmy tribes who haunted the great stretch of forest and swamp between the River Shal and the Portuguese Range, but there was a faint chance they might be still alive. It was in that hope that Elizabeth University, of which Dr. Luke had been a principal, had financed this expedition.

They had financed previous expeditions. That they had done so was a tribute to the greatness of Dr. Luke. No one in the University who had known him could believe he was really dead. They still spoke of his wisdom, his strength, his courage and his great knowledge of Africa. Explorer, big-game hunter and scientist, he had made it his life-work to solve the mysteries of the Dark Continent.

Felton, who was a student at Elizabeth University, had been brought up in the Luke tradition. He had read the Doctor's books, had examined his trophies in the science museum and developed a sort of hero worship for the great man. When the chance had come he had begged to be allowed to join the expedition. To save his hero, or at least help to solve the mystery of what had happened, nothing would give him greater happiness. That was his belief.

THEY were following the route Dr. Luke had planned to take from the River Shal. The country was mountainous and densely wooded. For days they had been working their way round the side of a mountain, that was not shown on any map. The heat was tremendous and they were plagued by insects. The trees grew so thickly that they walked in a sort of greenish twilight, forcing their way through scrub and creepers that seemed alive with a malicious desire to bar their progress.

Tired though he was, sleep still evaded Felton. He sat up and looked at the luminous dial of his watch. It was after midnight. His companions, whom he could see wrapped in blankets by the side of the smudge fire, had been asleep and snoring for hours.

They had arranged that one man must always be awake, as sentry. This was Featherstone's watch. The idea came to Felton that since he was unable to sleep himself he might as well relieve his friend.

He threw on some clothes and looked round. Where was Featherstone? There were only five men sleeping by the fire. Of the man who should have been guarding them he could see no sign.

Perhaps he'd gone across to the porter's camp about fifty yards distant. Using his torch because there was not a vestige of light under the trees he walked to where the porters were snoring as only Africans can. The light showed him the sprawling ebony bodies, the loads and the untidy remains of their supper, but no Featherstone.

Felton was puzzled. There were strict orders against anyone leaving the camp alone, and Featherstone, a solid, reliable Scotsman, would have been the last person to disobey.

Perhaps he had counted wrong and Featherstone *was* one of those sleeping by the fire! He decided to go back and make sure. If Featherstone were really missing he

would have to wake Major Andrews who was the leader of the expedition, and report his absence.

HE WAS halfway back when a voice speaking from the darkness made him stop.

"Come over here. I want to show you something."

It hadn't sounded like Featherstone. Felton flashed his torch in the direction, but could see nothing except creepers like huge snakes writhing between the trees.

"Featherstone? Is that you, Featherstone?"

The voice spoke again, hoarser and more indistinct.

"Yes, I'm Featherstone. Come here."

Perhaps he'd been injured! Felton left the track and began to plunge through the undergrowth.

He struggled on for about twenty yards, then he stopped again.

"Featherstone? Where the devil are you?"

Silence mocked him. He had an uncomfortable feeling he was not alone. Someone or something was watching him from beyond the radius of his torch.

Should he call out and alarm the camp? But he was loathe to be laughed at for a nervous young idiot. Jungle-nerves, that was what the old hands would say he was suffering from. Jungle-nerves, and a too vivid imagination.

As if to convince himself he wasn't really scared he went on another dozen yards. The light showed him he had reached the edge of a small clearing. Then it shone on something else—the figure of a man lying motionless on the sward.

"Featherstone?"

He ran forward and knelt beside the figure. Then he uttered a cry. The distorted face was hardly to be recognized. Featherstone was dead and his staring, glassy eyes were filled with terror.

For a minute Felton could not move. He had never seen violent death before, and the sight had shocked him into immobility.

Nausea swept over him like a cold wave. He rose blindly, and as he did so he heard something rustling behind him. Before he could turn something thin and snakelike passed over his head and tightened itself about his neck.

The pressure was intolerable. He fought like a madman in his choking agony. There was a roaring sound like a waterfall in his ears. Breathe! If he couldn't draw breath his heart must burst.

The noose round his neck was pitiless. His strength left him, he'd a feeling he was sinking. Then at last merciful oblivion passed over him like a cloud blotting out the sun.

HE RECOVERED consciousness to find himself in a cave. His throat ached abominably and he could taste blood. For a period he lay still, too sick even to wonder where he was or what had happened.

The sound of someone entering the cave made him open his eyes.

What he saw made him utter a cry. The man who had come in would have been very tall, but he walked with his back bent, his arms swinging and his head thrust forward. He was naked save for a strip of bark worn as a loincloth. His skin was the color of leather from exposure to sun and wind. A mane of white hair hung over his eyes, and a great tangled white beard fell down his chest. As he approached Felton was aware of a sour animal smell that revolted him.

The creature crept into the cave. He looked cowed and furtive to a degree. He cringed and smiled, while his eyes were full of cunning like the eyes of a vicious dog.

To Felton's astonishment he spoke in English. His accent was cultured, but he spoke very slowly as if the speech machinery were rusty from long disuse.

"I trust you are feeling better now?"

Felton spoke with an effort.

"My throat hurts. I want water."

"You can have some."

He went out with bent knees, his arms dangling so that his fingers almost touched the ground. In a few moments he returned bringing the scooped-out shell of a coconut filled with water. He carried it awkwardly, holding it in his cupped hands against his chin.

Felton drank and felt better. His head was clearer now and he could think.

"Where am I? What happened?"

The timid eyes were like lizards peeping through the tangled hair. He was squatting on his heels and hugging himself with his arms.

"I don't know. You were lying unconscious when I found you. There was a noose twisted round your neck. You had been almost stangled."

"Didn't you see anyone?"

"I saw no one. Probably the pigmies had attacked you. They are like the shadows of birds in the forest. Even the Great Masters fear the pigmies."

"The Great Masters?"

"Yes, the Great Masters," his voice was reverential, his face illuminated by an ecstatic smile. "The Great Masters who are so kind to man. I will take you to the Great Masters. You mustn't be afraid. The Great Masters are just and they rule with kindness. It's only when man disobeys that the Great Masters punish him. They punished Randall and Spears because they refused to be tamed. They shrieked and fought and went mad, so the Great Masters tore them to pieces. Yes, they tore them to pieces like rag dolls. I was wiser. When I saw what had happened to Randall and Spears I was submissive and they spared my life. Remember what I've told you. Obey the Great Masters and they will treat you with love."

Felton started up. Randall and Spears? Why were the names familiar? Then he remembered and he caught the other's arm.

"Two members of Dr. Luke's last expedition were called Randall and Spears!" he cried. "Who are you?"

The caricature seemed to straighten itself. For a second it was as if the spirit of a great man had returned to its body.

"I am Dr. Luke," he said. "At least I used to be Dr. Luke before—before I was caught and tamed."

Felton fell back. His head swam so that it was almost impossible to think. He'd found Dr. Luke! Rather, the ghost of Dr. Luke. What terror had transformed the great explorer into this shambling, mindless wreck? Then blackness swept over him and he could think no more.

WHEN he opened his eyes again he found himself alone in the cave. His watch had stopped, but by the lengthened

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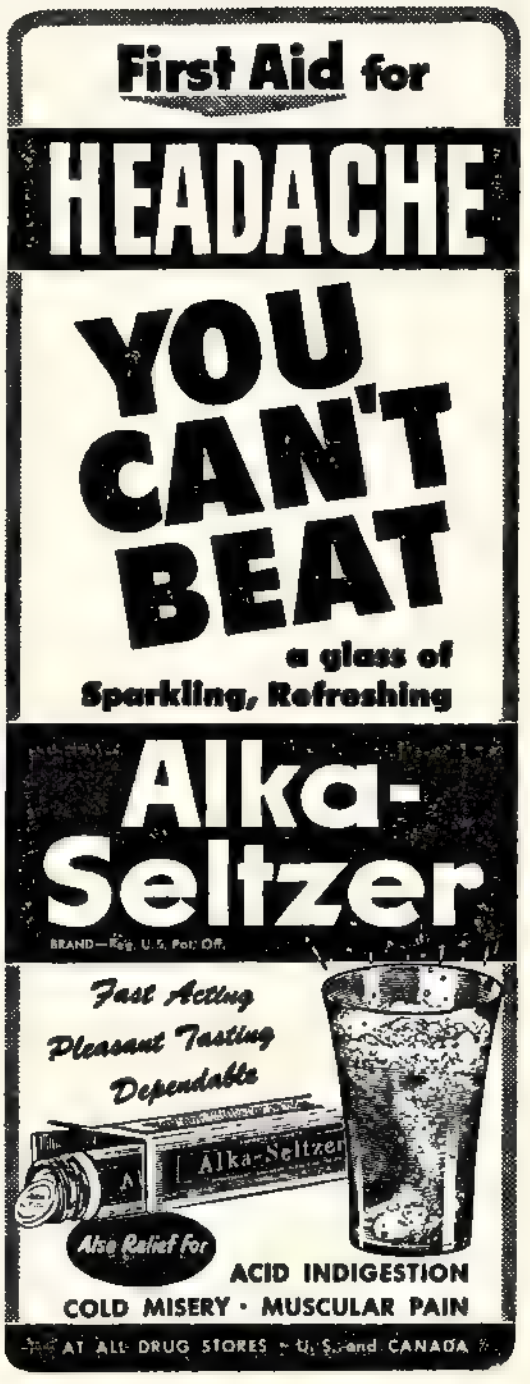


shadows he could see through the mouth of the cave he knew the day was drawing to its close.

The sleep had done him good. He rose and walked to the cave entrance. When he looked round he could not repress a cry of wonder. Below him and all around like the sea was a panorama of forest and mountain frightening in its infinite grandeur.

He hesitated what to do. There were two alternatives and they seemed equally unpleasant. He shrank from the thought of spending a night in the cave in company with Dr. Luke. Obviously the solitude of the forest had turned that once great brain. Almost certainly he had murdered Featherstone and all but strangled himself.

He considered the other alternative—that of leaving the cave and trying to find his companions. The idea of venturing alone and unarmed into that danger-filled forest appalled him. It would be suicide. He would have as much chance as a frog crawling on the bottom of the ocean.

THEN he saw something that decided him. Dr. Luke was returning. He had emerged from a clump of trees and was scrambling up the rocky hillside with amazing agility.

In a moment he had reached the cave. He was panting and his eyes were shining. Felton spoke with assumed casualness.

"I'm feeling a lot better, Doctor. What about trying to find the camp?"

"The camp?" Dr. Luke repeated.

"The expedition. They've come to search for you, you know. The whole civilized world is waiting to welcome you back."

"The civilized world!" Dr. Luke spat on the ground. "Do you think I'd leave my Master to go back to what men call civilization?"

Felton spoke as calmly as he could.

"Listen, Doctor, your friends would like to see you again. It's some years since you have seen and talked to a white man. We all want to hear your adventures, to learn what you have discovered about this unknown part of Africa. I am a student at Elizabeth University. All I know about Africa is what I've learned from reading your books. I . . ."

Dr. Luke was paying no attention. He had turned his head as if he were listening.

FELTON stopped speaking. Night was falling as if a dark veil were being drawn across the face of Africa. With the darkness the forest seemed to wake to life. A night bird uttered a mocking screech. From the forest came sullen coughing sounds suggestive of great beasts of prey seeking for their victims.

It had grown colder. Bats like black snowflakes swooped and gyrated above their heads. Again Felton seemed to hear that hollow booming sound, the dark laughter of Africa mocking the white man who would probe her secrets. Then he heard something else. A faint yelping sound as if a pack of hounds was racing through the forest.

"Ah," said the doctor. "They're coming. My brothers who serve the Great Masters are on the trail."

"Who are they?" Felton gasped. He felt himself on the edge of a horror he had not yet grasped.

The doctor spoke as if he were again on the lecture platform at Elizabeth University. "They are men who have found the ultimate happiness," he said. "The deepest human instinct is to love someone mighter than oneself whom one can serve and love. All religions are an effort to fulfil that urge. In both phenominal and transcendental philosophies the need for subjection to a stronger being is one of the acknowledged keystones of behaviorism. Kings and dictators owe their existence to that foible. To have someone to respect and worship, to be rewarded for doing right and justly punished for doing wrong—that is the deepest desire of the human ego. . . ."

Felton was not listening. He was on his feet, his face pallid with fear.

The hellish chorus was drawing nearer. He knew now of what it was composed. Men were whooping and screaming and cheering as they raced each other through the forest.

Their voices were more blood-curdling, more ferocious than the baying of hounds. They were shrill and abandoned like the voices of escaped lunatics bent on murder, as they rose from the darkness of the forest.

Felton turned to fly. On the instant the doctor's claw-like hand grasped his arm.

"Stay here. They are tame men and they

would tear you to pieces. They hate the wild of their own species as dogs hate a wolf."

Felton would have shaken him off, but then he realized it was too late. A dozen shadowy forms had emerged from the trees and were scrambling up the hillside. As they came nearer he saw they were Negroes, but of what tribe he could not tell. They were tall and emaciated with fierce, wolfish faces. Their cries and gestures as they raced over the rocks were more animal than human.

There was hatred and fear in their eyes. He caught up a stone and braced himself for a fight to a death, but then Dr. Luke sprang in front of him. With upraised arms he shouted something in a native dialect and they stopped.

Unwillingly, so it appeared to Felton. He could see their teeth and gleaming eyes as one by one they squatted till they formed a semi-circle round the mouth of the cave. They glared at him and fierce growling sounds issued from their throats—sounds that threatened death if he tried to escape.

Dr. Luke turned.

"I have warned them of the wrath of the Great Masters if they harm you," he said. "They fear me because my master is the Chief of the Great Ones. He chose me to be his man because my skin was white and I was more intelligent. You see, my friend, a degree and a white skin carry some weight even in darkest Africa!"

Though his words sounded mad, he looked quite sane. He was actually laughing at the horror and bewilderment on Felton's face. With a kindly gesture he patted the younger man's shoulder.

"Don't be frightened. If you obey their wishes they will be very kind to you. My master allows me to sleep at his feet. Once he risked his life to save me, his man, from a hunting leopard. When he strikes me it is only in play. We are more than master and man; we are friends."

Felton shrank away from him. This is a nightmare, he was saying to himself. This is a nightmare from which I must sometime wake.

Again the doctor put his hand on his arm. The circle of wolf-visaged watchers had drawn a little closer. Their mouths slavered and they made queer whining sounds.

"It is the only happiness," the doctor was saying, "man must have a master whom he can serve. When you have been tamed one of the Great Ones will take you for his own. He will cherish you because you have a white skin and are intelligent. The other men will be jealous, but their fear of the Great Ones . . ."

"Look out!" Felton yelled.

From the corner of his eyes he had glimpsed the rush. It was vicious and conducted as if a dam had suddenly burst.

The pack was on them before they could move. Felton struck out with the strength given by fear. The stone crashed into a hate-distorted face and the man who had leapt at his throat fell writhing.

Kicking and striking he tore himself free. The doctor seemed the main object of the pack's hatred. They had him down and were piling themselves on top, screaming like beast ravenous for blood.

Felton was forgotten. He began to run. He ran blindly with outstretched hands. Behind him was a Pit of howling horror; ahead there was . . . ? ? ?

He stared. Skipping shadows in the moonlight. Humped rocks that leapt soundlessly and with incredible speed? Great squat creatures chattered their anger as they hopped and swung themselves toward the men who fought like animals.

The sudden splendor of the African moon shining through a rift in the clouds, showed him what those monstrous shadows really were. They were gorillas, shaggy, red-eyed barrels of muscle with sloping shoulders and arms like twisted branches.

They paid no attention to Felton. The largest had reached the heap of struggling men. In the moonlight he saw the great monkey flinging Negroes right and left as contemptuously as a child might fling its dolls.

And then he saw it lift the doctor in its shaggy arms. It cradled him with great tenderness and love. He saw Dr. Luke wriggle in its embrace and raise his white head like a dog trying to lick his master's face.

And then Felton really heard the dark laughter of Africa. He rose and began to run.

AFRICA can sometimes be very kind to those who would profane her mysteries. By an amazing stroke of Providence Felton was found by his friends the following evening.

He had struggled blindly through miles of forest. His clothes were in rags, insects had bitten him and thorns had lacerated his skin. He was delirious, rambling wildly about Dr. Luke and the gorillas. Telling them again and again in a hoarse, fevered voice that the doctors and his porters had been captured by gorillas. . . . That they had become the pets of the great simians.

"He'll never leave his master," he gasped between paroxysms of delirious laughter. "He's too faithful. . . . *He's a one-gorilla man. . . ! He's a one-gorilla man!*"

"Jungle nerves," Major Andrews diagnosed. "Being lost in the forest has upset his mind. He'll be all right when he's had a good sleep."

Out of Space

by DOROTHY QUICK

SHE stared into the cauldron of the night.
Where wind lashed branches wove into a snare,
And fog rose out of a miasmic earth
Bringing strange music from she knew not where,
She could see nothing but the glinting light
Of eyes that made a pattern in the dark,
She did not know what evil gave them birth.
Swift winged as flinted arrows to a mark
They reached her heart. While in her ears the sound
Of beating music throbbed and louder grew.
The blackness ebbed like waves about her feet.
This was a terror no one ever knew.
This was an evil only she had found,
Nameless, and horrible from out of space.
She, at that moment, glimpsed where two worlds meet—
And tried, but could not turn her stricken face.

. . . doom to his faithless sons!

The Fifth Candle

BY CYRIL MAND

I fled, and cried out Death;
Hell trembled at the hideous name, and sighed
From all her caves, and back resounded Death.
—MILTON: Paradise Lost.

LAUGHABLE—isn't it?—that one so cynical and unbelieving as I should sit here, quivering and shaking in fear of a specter; that I should cower in dread, listening to the inexorable ticking of the remorseless clock. Amusing, indeed, that I should know terror.

And yet five years ago when we sat at this table, we five Brunof brothers, the way we laughed! The pall of stale, blue cigarette smoke that hung over us was an exotic mask for the strident laughter that echoed and re-echoed through it. The dim electric light filtered through its mistiness, centering upon the figure of the Old Man at the head of the table, frothing in fury. We were taunting him—perhaps a little too much, for of a sudden he calmed. His face became grim, almost imposing in spite of the tracks

of illness and age. His thin falsetto voice took on tone.

"So be it then! You my evil sons—you who instead of filial love and respect have given me affront and irreverence—you who have repeatedly brought disgrace upon my name—you who have been profligates, who through your squandering have nearly ruined me—you who have brought me to death's door—you shall now pay for your flagrancy.

"I was born in Russia—not the gay, carefree Russia of Moscow or Saint Petersburg but the silent, frigid Russia of the Kirghiz levels. The knowledge that for centuries had been the lore of these steppes was born into me. Jeer if you want to. My years of study in the occult haven't caused you alarm thus far. Let them not trouble you now.

"Look at that candelabrum with its five candles. I die tonight. But every year on this day, March 21, at this hour, eight o'clock, I shall return to this room to light a candle in that candelabrum. And as each candle burns itself down and flickers and dies, so shall one of you weaken and die. May this be my legacy to you, my evil sons!"

He retired beyond the scope of the haze-diffused light into the black yawn of the hallway, leaving us laughing and hurling gibes at his retreating figure. Later, we did not laugh so much, when we went into his somber walnut-paneled room and found his shriveled body at the desk, his lifeless head with beady eyes glazed in death, pillowed on the crumpled pages of one of his evil Russian volumes.

THE Old Man left the house to all of us, together. Because of this, and also of our lack of money, March 21 of the next year found us all, but one, Sergei, seated at the table at dinner. The odors and harsh clatter of dinner-time jarred against the calm placidity of approaching spring. We were laughing again. Ivan, who always did seem like a younger and more droll edition of myself, had remembered the anniversary of the curse. With mock ceremony he had abstained from lighting one of the candles in the candelabrum and had made us leave the chair at the head of the table vacant. Now we sat listening to his ribald jests at the Old Man's expense.

"Be patient, brothers. But four and one-half minutes more," he said, glancing at the huge, gold-handed Peter the First clock at the side of the room, "and we shall be again honored by the presence of our esteemed father. And who shall be the first he takes back with him? Certainly not me—the youngest. Probably you, Alexei," he grinned at me. "He always did hate you most. Ever fleering him in your nice quiet way. Sneering. Laughing up your sleeve at him and his distemper. And then, too, you are the oldest of us. You're first in line. Boris, why don't you pray for him a bit? A religious cove like you ought to be able to really go to town on his black soul.

"Ah, it's time for our phantom. It's eight o'clock. Hello, Old Man." He rose, bowing to an imaginary figure at the door. "How are you? How's it back there in Hades? You *did* go there. Sit right dow—" His speech died off.

The chamber darkened. A queer, spectral haze filled the room. It swished and swirled yet ever contracted toward a single point—the chair at the head of the table. We gazed, stupefied. It became a shape. The shape became—a man. There could be no mistake. The shriveled figure; the wolfish head with its piercing, beady eyes, hawk-like nose, bulging forehead, and parchment cheeks—it was the Old Man!

We stared aghast. Ivan staggered back. Boris crossed himself. Dmitri and I just sat, unnerved, frozen into impotency. The Old Man stood up. He slowly extended his fleshless hand toward the malefically scintillating candelabrum on the table. The unlit candle flared into life. His well-remembered falsetto came as of old, seeming strangely melancholy.

"Even as this candle burns down and flickers and dies, so shall you weaken and die, Ivan."

Ivan gasped. Dmitri's oath shattered the silence as he leaped up and reached for the fowling-piece over the mantel. He grasped it and fired blindly as he turned. The detonation echoed back and forth in the narrow confines of the room. The air was polluted by gun smoke and the bitter tang of exploded powder. The candle sputtered, undulated, and flamed on. The smoke cleared slowly. The misty figure of the Old Man

was gone. And on the floor, thrashing frantically, lay Ivan, blood spurting from a wound in his chest.

We rushed to him, all except Boris, who stood, devoutly blind eyes fixed on the ceiling, muttering monotonous prayer. Dmitri cursed himself violently. It was a mortal wound. We bandaged him in vain. His life ebbed out with his blood. And as he breathed out his last, the lone candle flickered and went out.

THE trial was a nightmare. Of course, we three brothers stood firmly behind Dmitri. Sergei was the real mainstay, though. He saw to the selecting and the hiring of the lawyers, and the various other matters of Dmitri's defense. As a prosperous business man his influence and money aided us immeasurably. Throughout Dmitri's successive convictions for first degree murder, it was always Sergei who secured another appeal and carried the case to a still higher court while the months dragged along.

But it was all futile. Dmitri and Ivan had always been utter opposites in character. As a result, they had had violent and frequent quarrels. It was these clashes of opposing wills—in reality unimportant, but to the world highly significant—that were now continually flaunted before the jury. At each trial we repeated the story of the Old Man's curse and the part it had played in Ivan's death—and were laughed down as liars, lunatics, or both. We only succeeded in making our case ridiculous and in tying tighter the noose around Dmitri's neck. We fought on in vain.

In the heat of litigation we almost forgot the shadow that hung over us too. And yet the sands were running low.

Finally, the inevitable occurred. On January 30, the highest court of the state set the date of execution by hanging for the week of March 17. The governor refused a reprieve. We could do no more. We gave up the fight and went home.

On the night of March 21, a few minutes after eight o'clock, at the same time that three brothers sitting at dinner watched a lone candle flicker and burn out, Dmitri Brunof at the state penitentiary was executed for murder in the first degree.

BORIS was really frightened now. According to age he was next to go after Dmitri. He lived in a mortal funk of terror. For a time he turned to religion as a means of escape. The pageantry and ceremonies of the Church imparted to him an illusion of power and protection. However, religion was not the thing for him now. It had an undue influence on his mind, battered as it was by repeated shock and terror; and his inherent mysticism was intensified by it to a stark fanaticism.

His superstitions, too, were magnified and stimulated. He grew into an unreasoning dread of the dark. He became the victim of charlatans and fakes. He spent his money on occult remedies and charms. Any exhibition of seemingly supernatural power awed and frightened him.

And then at a stage show of Edward Rentmore, the English wizard, he went into hysterics. This and the notoriety we had achieved through our evidence at Dmitri's trial were enough to gain us Rentmore's attention. Besides being an illusionist, he had gained quite a degree of fame as a medium. To Boris, whom he now befriended, he was another bulwark against the power of the Old Man. Under his influence Boris became an adherent of spiritualism. He developed into an actual disciple of Rentmore. And finally Rentmore brought his mind to bear upon his underling's problem. As was natural to him, considering his vocation, he decided that the best protection against the Old Man would be to fight him with his own weapon—the occult. And so, during the time remaining till March 21 Boris and Rentmore were engaged in preparing for the destruction of the Old Man on the night of his appearance. They sat up far into the night poring over the Old Man's malefic Russian volumes. It was in that dimly lit library that they learned to develop their innate mind-forces. Sergei and I just waited, watching skeptically, grimly amused.

On March 21 at dinner, Rentmore, Boris, Sergei and I were seated at the table. It was almost eight o'clock. The dim, inadequate light illuminated us feebly: Sergei, white face twisted into a cynical smile; Boris, nervously confident; and Rentmore, his sallow, yellow face frozen into a featureless impenetrability.

We were hardly surprised when that unearthly mist came and condensed, forming the shape of the Old Man. Sergei and I sat as if drugged, detachedly curious as spectators, conscious of the seething ferment of battle around us. We *felt* that struggle—mind against mind, will against will, knowledge against knowledge.

Then, as the beat of the hostile wills fell upon it, the form of the Old Man seemed to blur, diffuse, go queerly out of focus. We were winning! My detachedness vanished. I felt jubilant. The shadow that hung over us was lifting. But no! The figure of the Old Man once more took on its sharp, well-defined lines. Inexorably his arm reached out. Slowly, almost as if reluctantly, the candle in the candelabrum flamed up in response to that outstretched, withered hand. That thin statement of doom once more shrilled through the air.

"Even as this candle burns down and flickers and dies, so shall you weaken and die, Boris."

We stared at the candle, fascinated—not even noticing in what manner the Old Man went.

The Peter the First clock ticked on, its golden hands slicing time and life, slowly and deliberately. The candle burned with a steady, even flame. Minutes passed. Rentmore lay in an exhausted stupor. The flame flickered, danced wildly as some slight current of air twisted it askew. It steadied, then flickered again. For a moment it writhed fitly, sputtering.

Boris screamed—a long, agonized shriek. He started up, with one hand sweeping the candelabrum from the table, with the other fumbling at the insecurely mounted light-button. Then, suddenly, he choked, gasped, as if suffocating. The candelabrum seemed to cling to his hand. His twisted face mimicked our horror.

He slumped to the floor, breaking that lethal current of electricity, a grotesque heap of death. The candelabrum slipped from his hand, its clatter muffled by the exotic thickness of the Khivan rug.

SERGEI had always been the cleverest one of us. He was practical, and besides his native cunning he possessed a good amount of real intelligence. Therefore, to him, of all the brothers, had passed the administration of our affairs. And certainly he had always done well in this capacity.

Whenever he had a problem, either personal or of business, he sat down alone in a half-dark room and there analyzed, speculated, and made and discarded schemes until he was sure he had the correct solution. It was this that he did now. The day after Boris' death he sat for a long time in the huge, half-lit dining room, staring with perplexed eyes and knit brows at the candelabrum. It was long after I had gone to a sleepless bed that I heard him tread heavily up to his room.

The next morning he gave me his solution as I knew he would. "It seems that just two things are menacing us—the Old Man and the candelabrum. It is these two things that we must fight against if we want to survive. The Old Man is, of course, beyond our reach. However, the candelabrum—" His hand had knocked over a glass of water. He regarded the weaving track of the spilled liquid. "It is of solid gold and valuable. This afternoon when I go to the city I shall take it with me. At the Government mint I shall sell it as old gold. Within a week, probably, it will be melted down and stamped into coins. The coins will circulate and by March 21 the candelabrum will be scattered all over the country. Then let us see how our esteemed father will take the loss of his precious candelabrum. In his present state he can hardly curse another of the things. Yes, I think we are safe. . . ."

I rather agreed with him. I rejoiced now as in the old days Ivan, Dmitri, Boris and I had rejoiced together in having a brother gifted with that elusive thing—common sense. I was confident that Sergei's canniness had saved us. The candelabrum was duly sold and, as our inquiries a few months later, proved, melted down. Thus with the material threat of the curse removed, our fears vanished. We joked again, if rather grimly, of the Old Man. We mocked once more—mimicking the Old Man's falsetto voice. We speculated endlessly as to what the Old Man would do when he failed to find the candelabrum when he came to light it—or did he know already? We laughed again. . . . The days and weeks and months passed quickly, unclouded.

March 21 found me at a friend's house. Sergei was traveling again on one of his business trips, and I had no desire to be present alone when the Old Man came to light the candle in the vanished candelabrum. The day, the evening, and even the eighth hour passed easily. My friend and I chatted, supped, and played chess. Finally we went to bed.

I dropped off to sleep almost immediately. And then—out of the forefront of oblivion, as if he had been waiting for me, came the Old Man. The black nothingness behind him became a swirling mist that advanced and settled down around us. I was seated at the table. I looked wildly about me. There at the side the Peter the First clock marked eight o'clock. The candelabrum occupied the centre of the table. And as the candle in it flared into life, the Old Man's words came to me.

"Even as this candle burns down and flickers out, so shall you weaken and die, Sergei."

I awoke shrieking at the gray dawn.

I dressed hurriedly, rushed downstairs, and seized the newspaper. The front page was smeared with a flamboyantly written and detailed account of a railway wreck. I read it through carefully. Among the killed was —Sergei Brunof. I looked for the time of the crash, strangely calm now. Yes, it had happened just after eight.

FOR two weeks I could not bring myself to go to the mansion. Not only was it the fear of that lonely old building with its charnel atmosphere, but also melancholy that kept me away. I knew how sad it would be to live there with the shades of vanished lives and muted laughter. The phantoms of my four brothers and the Old Man still peopled those silent rooms and empty halls.

Finally I did again venture into the dark oppressiveness of the house. And then in the dining-room I received another shock. There on the table where it had always stood before, and where I had seen it in the dream, was the candelabrum. Ridiculous, fantastic, impossible! And yet there it was, its dull golden glitter mocking me! I was stricken, bemazed—and yet really I knew that I had expected some such thing. So I just left it there.

And so it stood there throughout the year. Every day I sat at the table and ate my lonely meals, watching it cautiously, as if it were a live, malevolent being. I think I went a little mad watching it. It seemed to hypnotize me, too. It possessed an eery power over my mind. It drew me from whatever I was doing at times. I sat and gazed at it for hours. I mused endlessly as to what strange hands had hammered it again to its old shape, what weird tools had again formed its graceful branches. And all the time it seemed to be possessed of that same unearthly sentience. I could hardly bear even to dust it. I tried a few times to escape its evil spell. I went away—only to leave abruptly wherever I was, lured back to the dank old house and the glittering candelabrum. I lost contact with all humans. My supplies were sent out from the city by a boy who seemed to fear me as if I were the devil himself. I hardly ate. I just watched it. It seemed the only real thing in a house of mist and indistinctness. Vague and unrelated thoughts crept into my mind. I felt strangely confused and bewildered. It inspired me with an irrational and insatiable longing for something—I don't know what. I took to stalking the long, gloomy corridors in a frenzied search for the non-existent.

Today, cold fear jelled my panic into a sort of blunt insensibility when I realized that it was March 21. I sat all day at the table in a dull stupor, staring with dead, vacant eyes at the golden candelabrum.

Suddenly the desire to set this tale on paper came to me. The reaction to my apathy set in. Of a sudden I was full of a nervous, driving energy. For the past hour I have been sitting here writing. I am glad that I have been able to finish in time. The hour for the fifth candle draws near.

Ivan, Dmitri, Sergei, Boris—they are all gone. The Old Man took them. And certainly he will take me, too. Perhaps it will be just as well if I join them. I'll be back among my own. Dust to dust. . . .

It is after eight already. The candelabrum is empty of candles. I wonder, will he bring one. . . .

The Little Tree

by

C. F. Birdsall

. . . One could feel the growth impulse in the tree's tiny limbs.

Heading by Joseph Eberle

IT WAS one of those nights in late August when the heat and the humidity seem to close in on people in a smothering conspiracy. I had motored into the small, Mid-Western city, without a hotel reservation and found a district horticultural convention in progress. I had been lucky to get a stuffy little room on the third floor of a second-rate hotel.

It was like an inferno after the air-conditioned room I had enjoyed in Chicago the previous night.

I tossed and rolled on the uncomfortable bed until my watch showed 6:30 o'clock, then I got up intending to shower and see if I could grab a breath of cool air by the window until the coffee shop opened. I had a business appointment for ten o'clock that morning, otherwise I would have proceeded on my way to Detroit.

Literally dripping perspiration, I looked out of the window and discovered that there was a little public park, centred by a mid-Victorian style courthouse, across the street. I remembered that some years before I had found relief from the mid-summer heat in a St. Louis hotel room by spending the early morning hours in a nearby park. I decided it was worth another trial.

Within half an hour I had showered and wearing only a sport shirt, lightweight trousers and slippers, I went down to the lobby, stopping to tell the sleepy-eyed desk clerk that I thought I'd see if the park was cooler than my room.

"Can't be any hotter, I'll bet," he said sympathetically. I cut across an almost deserted street. A red sun in the east gave notice of another scorcher.

I dropped down on a faded green bench, just off a flagstone walk that led to the front entrance of the courthouse. A tall elm tree and a smaller maple shaded that part of the

grounds. Nearby, water trickled desultorily from the broken beak of a cast-iron heron poised on one leg in the centre of a once ornate fountain.

A few pedestrians were passing by this time—wilted looking people evidently on their way to work. An occasional truck rattled and rumbled by; but so far as the park was concerned, I had it all to myself. At least I thought so.

I was studying the design of a rather pretty example of carpet bedding in front of me when a low, strangely musical voice said, "Are you interested in horticulture, sir?"

Startled, I turned and found the owner of the voice seated at the other end of the bench. He was a queer looking little man—queer looking in a sort of vague, uncertain way. What I mean is that I find it difficult now, as I did then, to describe him clearly. He seemed to be from another age, or from some part of the old world where such Bohemian raiment as green velour hats, plum-colored coats, voluminous fawn trousers and flowing black bow ties were in style. I believe he was wearing the semblance of a mustache, but as I stated, his features were indistinct.

ONE thing does stand out clearly in my mind: He had a monocle screwed into his right eye.

His whole appearance was so surprising and his presence there so unexpected, that moments elapsed before I realized that he had addressed me.

"Pardon?" I answered.

"I suggested that possibly you were here through an interest in horticulture," the stranger said—and again I was struck by the low resonance of his voice.

"No," I told him, rather shortly," I am not attending the horticultural convention in this town, if that is what you mean."

"But you are interested in the subject?" he asked.

"Nope," I replied.

"I felt that you must be from the interest you were taking in that very nice example of carpet bedding," he persisted.

"Look, fella," I said, a bit annoyed, "I'm afraid you've got me wrong. I came over here to see if it was any cooler than the ten by twelve oven in that hotel where I tried to sleep last night. As for admiring that posey bed, it was just something to look at. I'm not sure whether those flowers are pansies or geraniums."

"But you are joking, I suggest," he protested politely. "I am sure you know that those plants are of the colorful Coleus family?"

"Brother," I said, "I'm trying to tell you that I didn't even know Coleus had a family. I thought he was an old bachelor."

My horticultural witticism went right over his little green hat. And I just couldn't squelch him.

"I wonder, sir, if you would be interested in a demonstration of growth by multi-dimensional impulse I was about to make?" he came right back at me.

"I'm sure that's all I need to round out a warm morning," I said, and I laid the sarcasm on heavy. He didn't look a bit taken back.

"You have heard of hormones?" he asked me.

"Who hasn't?" I answered.

"I have discovered the super-hormone," he informed me, modestly.

"Good for you," I said, without enthusiasm. The heat was beginning to get me again.

"Its effect when impulsed into the life stream of a plant is quite unprecedented," he said.

"Really obeys the impulse, eh?" I wisecracked. It rolled off of him like rain.

"With your permission, sir, I shall show you." And with that my bench acquaintance started opening a large paperboard carton at the end of the bench.

He uncovered a small wooden tub containing a diminutive tree with tiny gnarled limbs and Tom Thumb leaves and placed it in front of the bench about three feet from me. It looked like pictures of those funny Singer Midget trees the Japanese dwarf, that I had seen.

"I have here, sir, a specimen of Quercus lucida in which growth has been quite successfully arrested for years," the little man informed me. "I might say I have attained some measure of success in dwarfing certain species of oaks by halting the natural hormone impulses in the life stream. I have

chosen the oak because of its antiquity and longevity."

He sure could use big words in the right places.

"The Japanese have attained their greatest success in arresting growth working with certain species of cypress and cedar," he added.

How that little chap kept so cool and pompous was beyond me!

AS HE was speaking, my acquaintance took from a coat pocket a black case resembling a doctor's small surgical kit, opened it and removed a glass hypodermic tube filled with an amber-colored fluid. Deftly he fitted on a metallic needle with plunger attachment.

"Now, sir," he said, "if you will observe closely I shall endeavor to show you how rapidly one of these arrested forms of plant life responds to multidimensional impulse."

With that he jabbed the needle into the base of the little tree and started pressing the fluid from the tube.

And right then my indifference disappeared. I'm telling you that little tree literally exploded in size. One moment I was looking down at the top of it, the next moment I was gaping up at the top.

"It is rather startling, isn't it?" said the little man, reading my thoughts. "Come nearer, sir, and feel the growth impulse in the limbs."

Rather gingerly, I placed my right hand on the limb nearest to me. I felt a queer, pulsating sensation. The limb expanded and extended under my hand. A branch swept past my face.

"Good God, it's uncanny!" I heard myself saying.

"Grasp the limb firmly with both your hands, sir," the little man urged.

Fascinated, I did as he directed. He shot the remainder of the fluid into the trunk.

I was jerked off my feet. An unseen force lifted me upward, as if I were on the end of the rope of an ascending balloon. Then I felt myself falling. I clutched wildly at branches that were rushing all around me. And that was all I remembered until a gruff voice brought me back to my senses.

"What's going on here?" the gruff voice asked.

I looked up and saw a red-faced police officer standing over me. I was lying on the grass, near the bench.

"O. K., buddy," said the policeman, "the celebration's over. Up on your feet and out of here or I'll run you in!"

I struggled to my feet, dizzy from my fall and looked about me, bewildered. Sharp pains shot through my head and down my spine.

"Where is he?" I asked.

"Where is who?" asked the cop.

"The little man with the magic tree," I answered, inanely. "The tree that jerked me up into the air—it was right there."

"I don't know what you were drinking, buddy," said the cop. "Sounds like squirrel whiskey."

"But didn't you see a little man in queer clothes with a tree in a tub?" I pleaded.

"Listen, buddy," he replied, "all I saw was you sprawled out there on the grass beside that bench, and the only trees are that big elm and that maple over there."

"You sure must have tied on a dandy one last night," he added. "I guess you convention delegates are all alike when you get away from home."

"But there was a funny little man with a tree in a tub and a hypodermic syringe," I protested. "I'm not a convention delegate and I haven't been drinking, officer."

"If you want to keep on arguing, you can tell it to the desk sergeant, or you can move on peacefully," he said. "You got any place to go?"

"I've a room in that hotel across there," I answered, "but I insist, officer, there was a little man and a tree that jerked me up into the air."

I ADMIT now that must have sounded like the aftermath of an alcoholic nightmare to that policeman. No wonder he lost his temper.

"A little man and a little tree that jerked you into the air," he mimicked, nastily. "I've been patient with you, young fellow, but I'm not going to be any longer. If you want to keep on raving, we've got a nice cell over in that building (he pointed to the old courthouse) where you can enjoy yourself chasing pink elephants and bob-tailed butterflies."

"O.K., officer," I said, resignedly. "I'll forget about it."

But I couldn't forget about it. I was still woozey when I got back to my room in the hotel. My watch showed me I had been gone less than half an hour. The temperature in the room must have been around eighty; but the bed looked welcome. I sprawled across it, head throbbing and every bone in my body hurting.

Something proceeded to irritate the back of my neck. I reached up and pulled out a small branch that was stuck under the damp collar of my shirt. I glanced at it through half-closed eyes. Then I sat up in a hurry.

There were three leaves attached to that piece of branch, and I was horticulturist enough to know they were not elm or maple leaves. They were large-sized editions of the tiny leaves I had seen on that dwarf tree in the park half an hour previously.

FORGETTING my aches and pains, I hurriedly made myself presentable by donning another pair of summer trousers and a clean shirt and tie and went down to the lobby again. The piece of branch with the three leaves attached to it was in an envelope in my briefcase.

I had one thought in mind. I must find somebody who could clear up this strange mystery.

The same sleepy-eyed clerk was at the desk. "Can you tell me where the meetings of the horticultural convention are being held?" I asked him.

"In the Jefferson Hotel just around the corner on the next street," he answered.

I knew where the Jefferson was, having tried to get a room there the night before.

As I started for the door, the clerk called: "They're meeting in the ballroom on the second floor. It's air-conditioned—but they don't start until nine o'clock," he added.

"Thanks," I called back, "maybe somebody will be there early."

I was lucky. There was a distinguished-looking, middle-aged man, with a trim, iron gray mustache and Van Dyke beard, seated at a long table at the far end of the big room. He was busily writing in a notebook, loose papers and brochures scattered in front of him. He looked up and smiled pleasantly as I approached.

"Pardon me," I asked, "but are you one of the convention delegates?"

"I guess you can call me a delegate," he replied. "I am Dr. Bassett, curator of the State Arboretum. I came here early to prepare a talk I am giving this morning. Was there something you wanted?"

"Yes, there is, Doctor," I said, "but first I want to assure you that I am neither intoxicated nor dilly with the heat. That may sound strange, but I've got to convince you that I'm rational."

Dr. Bassett's eyes twinkled.

"You appear quite rational," he said, "and so far I haven't detected any alcoholic odors."

"O.K.," I said, and I placed my briefcase on the table, opened it and took out the envelope containing the twig and the leaves. "Can you tell me what kind of a tree that is from?"

Dr. Bassett put on a pair of shell-rimmed glasses and examined the exhibit closely.

"H'mm," he mused, "this is a bit unusual. May I ask where you got this?"

"I got it from a tree near here," I said.

"But, my good man," he said, "I know of no trees like this growing anywhere near here—and this branch is freshly broken"

"What kind of a tree do those leaves belong to?" I asked.

Dr. Bassett again peered intently at the leaves. "Unless I am mistaken, and I don't think I am," he said, "they belong to a species of oak that is indigenous to the tropical parts of Asia. It is commonly called the Malayan oak. Now will you satisfy my curiosity and tell me where you got it?"

"Doctor," I said, evading the question, "do you know a funny little chap with a soft, musical voice who goes around wearing a green hat, a plum-colored coat, fawn pants and a black flowing tie, with a monocle stuck in his eye?"

"That sounds like a description of the Baron," he said.

"The Baron?" I asked.

"We called him the Baron because he claimed to belong to the Dutch nobility," Dr. Bassett enlightened me. "His name was Jan Vanderklass. His origin was somewhat of a mystery. He was supposed to have come from the Dutch East Indies.

"He was a strange little man," Dr. Bas-

sett continued. "We could never decide whether he was a genius or a charlatan. He made fantastic claims about gaining control of the laws of nature and used to get off some twaddle about dimensional impulses; nevertheless, he did possess quite advanced knowledge of plant genetics. In fact, he did some unusual research in the use of the so-called wonder drug, colchicine, in doubling chromosome numbers, at the Arboretum. But why this inquiry about the Baron? It's the first mention of him I have heard in months."

"You speak of him in the past tense, Doctor," I said.

"Naturally one speaks of the dead in the past tense," said the Doctor.

"Dead!" I exclaimed. "This—this Baron is dead?"

"Very much so," Dr. Bassett answered. "He died about two years ago, at the time we held our first convention here. And there was a bit of mystery even about the poor little devil's death."

I felt a cold fear creeping through me.

"Mystery about his death?" I asked.

"His body was found pretty badly broken," Dr. Bassett said. "I believe the autopsy showed that both legs and one arm were fractured, but that death was due to a severe skull fracture."

Responsive pains shot through my head and down into my spine.

"The police investigated the homicide angle but couldn't find any evidence of foul play. There was no motive. No one would have robbed the Baron because he was barely able to subsist on an insignificant pension—some said it was a remittance from the family estate in Holland. I think that's the reason he wore those comic opera clothes; he couldn't afford others."

MY MOUTH tasted dry as I asked, "What do you think caused his death?"

"I think he was either struck by a motor vehicle or he died from a fall," Dr. Bassett said, "but what puzzled the investigating authorities is how his body got to where it was found, unless it was carried there."

I dreaded asking the next question, but I had to: "Where was his body found, Doctor?"

"It was sprawled out grotesquely on the grass in the courthouse square, near the antiquated fountain," he answered. "One would almost think from its position that the Baron had fallen from a considerable height. But now, young man, what's this all about? I want to know. You've got my curiosity aroused; and you still haven't given me a satisfactory explanation concerning this bit of Malayan oak tree."

I wanted to tell this kindly man what had occurred to me, but I hesitated.

"Dr. Bassett, I have had an unbelievable experience this morning—" I began, when a bellhop hurried across the big room.

"You're wanted on the 'phone, Dr. Bassett," he called. "It's long distance and the party calling is waiting on the line. You'll have to take the call downstairs off the main lobby."

Dr. Bassett turned to me as he was leaving.

"Excuse me; I think this call is important. But don't leave, please," he requested. "I'll be only a few minutes and I want to hear all about your unbelievable experience."

Well, if Dr. Bassett should happen to read what I have written, he will know now what I didn't have the courage to tell him last year during our little chat in that little Midwestern city that I hope I will never have to visit again.

And if he wants to know what became of that piece of tree branch with three leaves on it, I have it locked in the office safe.

It might also interest the good doctor to know that I looked at that memento of my strangest experience only this morning. The leaves have never wilted nor turned brown; and the branch still looks as if it had just been broken off!

Double Haunt

BY JOSEPH HOWARD KRUCHER

It just seemed to come out of the night—that road.

The Night Road

BY AUGUST DERLETH

THERE is something about out of the way country places which suggests the adventurous unknown, the strange, the mysterious, as were these things inherent in the human lives so remotely lived out in such places. People born and dying far away from the centers of civilization, people who may never use a telephone or listen to a radio, locked away in the hollows of the hills, with little-used roads connecting them to the highways, which for many of those country people must mark the known boundaries of their world.

The little-used roads. Rutted and grass-grown sometimes. Or, like the one Evelyn called the "road that just seems to come out at night," with what was meant to be a note of gay enchantment and turned

Heading by Virgil Finlay

out to be something more. I could set down here that I had passed it a score of times, but would it be true? I don't know. It led off the ridge road between Green Spring and Logtown in southern Wisconsin, a smooth gravelled road that didn't stay gravelled or smooth.

Evelyn noticed it first. We were coming back from a movie at Green Spring late one night before we were married, and Evelyn said, "There's a road off here to the side somewhere. It's a strange road. Nobody ever turns off on it. It's a road that just seems to come out at night."

"Do you want to take it?" I asked.

"I hate to park on the highway. There's so much traffic."

I drove slower, until she caught sight of the turn.

"There it is. Drive in."

I drove in from the ridge. The road that was so inviting soon became rutted and difficult, and it went almost straight down off the ridge, a dark road with the trees crowding close upon it. I had to slow down, shift, pull forward, maneuver the ruts, the washed out portions of the road, the muck and mud.

"Where does it lead to"? I asked at last.

"I don't know," Evelyn confessed. "You always talk about the charm of country roads."

"By day," I said.

"Well, it goes somewhere," she said, laughing. "Every road has to go somewhere."

"It doesn't look even modern," I said. "Like nothing put here this year or ten years ago."

Nor, in fact, did it. Country roads are narrow, dusty, sometimes overgrown. But this one was rocky, rutted, muddy, with a look of such age that it might have been a road used long ago and long since abandoned.

There was not a mark on it of a tire, but here and there a wagon wheel, or a buggy's narrower track. And the trees that pressed so closely upon it and were so young at the place where we had entered upon it, were older and older the farther we went. Where at first there had been fence-lines, here now there was nothing.

Two miles, three—we were at the bottom of the hollow, and Evelyn sat silent at my side.

I slowed up and came to a stop.

"Where are we?" she asked in a small voice.

"I don't know."

"There should be a turn somewhere, or a crossroads."

"We'll see."

But at this point, our venturesome drive turned into an unnecessary chance. The car would not start.

"Well, here we are in the middle of nowhere," she said. "Better put out the lights or you'll wear the battery down."

I did so.

We sat for a moment in absolute stillness. Not a bird's voice, not the rustle of a mouse in the grass, not an animal's cry. I reached for her through the darkness, drew her close and kissed her long.

"We always wanted to be shut away from the world, didn't we?" I said. "Now here we are, maybe three miles from the highway, but a thousand from anywhere."

"Will we have to walk back?"

"No, the car'll start after it rests a little —I hope!"

I kissed her again.

"Is that a light over there, Will?"

I turned. Back from the road shone a pale yellow glow.

"Must be."

"We'd better find out where we are, just in case the car doesn't start."

THE moment I stepped outside the car, I felt it. Something wrong, some note of error, something not as it should be. In the car there had been no sound from outside, but now, outside, the air was filled with sound—the thousand small rustlings in the grass of mice and voles and shrews, the indistinguishable hum of life in the woods, the almost deafening chorus of the whippoorwills, for the month was June of a late spring, and the whippoorwills were mating. But of all this, in the car, nothing.

I went around and opened the door for Evelyn. How small and frail she looked against that vaguely menacing darkness pressing in from all sides! The light in the farmhouse window was a welcome haven.

"I can't see," she said. And, "Listen to those whippoorwills!"

"I'm listening," I said. "Wait a minute. I've got a key-ring flashlight—it'll help a little."

I turned it on. There was a kind of path, or a place where not much grew. We walked along it, Evelyn close behind me. The house grew out of the darkness, dark, too, like the night and the woods, a stone house which was old, so old that vines covered all one wall of it, creeping even upon the window.

"There's the door," said Evelyn.

I went up to it and knocked. It opened under my knock, and the light shone out of the room. There was a young woman standing up against one wall there, dark-skinned, lustrous-eyed, a beauty. And two men were sitting across a table paying no attention to anything but each other. The woman was watching them; her eyes were scornful, aloof, remote, and yet she was intensely interested in what was going on. A game? I wondered.

"Can you tell us where we are?" I asked.

None of them looked toward us. No one answered.

There was a broad-shouldered man. He said, "It's your cut, Neil."

And a slender man. He said, "How many times?"

"Three. This is your last cut."

They were dressed like country people, but in old-fashioned clothes. The young woman had on a dress which came up to just under her ears. Of some black material. Evelyn said later it was taffeta; I wouldn't know.

"Paul, you can't do it," she said.

"I can do anything," he answered.

"Even to this," she said bitterly. "I never wanted to come to Lost Hope Valley. There is a curse on it, there's a curse on us all."

The broad-shouldered man looked at her and said, "If there is, it's a woman's curse—the curse of a woman who couldn't be satisfied with one man."

"You could die of loneliness here," she said.

I coughed, loudly. "Could you tell us—" I began. But no one was listening. I felt Evelyn take hold of my arm, pull it. I looked at her. She inclined her head a little; her motion and her eyes said urgently, "Out!"

I went back to the porch, leaving the door stand open.

"Something's going to happen," she said.

"Something's always going to happen, sure."

"No, no," she said, and bit her lip. "Something terrible. Please, I feel it!"

I chuckled. "Let that be a lesson to you. Don't go leading men down strange roads at night." I made a half-hearted attempt to leer at her. But her eyes were closed tightly now.

AT ANY rate, I thought, I knew where we were—in a sort of way. Lost Hope Valley. Long ago I had found an old copy of the Green Spring *News*, a weekly paper with country correspondents who filled its inside pages. There was news from Logtown and Black Hawk and Cross Corners, Little Bear Valley and Bear Junction. Yes, and Lost Hope Valley. All the others were still in the *News* today, but not Lost Hope Valley. That had retreated into silence. Small wonder!

I looked back into the room, examining the two men. They looked alike. Brothers, perhaps. The woman had a wedding ring on. Perhaps she was married to one of them. There was a little smile on her lips now, and for a moment the scene held; nobody moved, waiting for the slender man, Neil, to cut his card. Then he cut and turned the cards over. I could see the card in the yellow light of the kerosene lamp on the table.

The seven of spades.

The woman gave a sharp cry. "You cut the seven of spades! Oh, Neil—spades! It's a death card."

He paid no attention to her. "Beat that," he said to his brother.

The broad-shouldered man cut the five of hearts.

"You won, Neil," said the woman.

"All fair and square," said Neil, laughing.

"Yes, now," said Paul. "Now, by the cards. But how was it before, when my back was turned, when I was out in the fields, off in the woods—how was it then?"

"You said you'd abide by the cards."

"I did. I said it, and I will. But I didn't say how."

With that, he pushed his chair away from the table and stood up. There was a pistol in his hand. He pulled the trigger, and the slender man fell forward on the table. The woman screamed and came at him like a tiger; she had a knife. He shot her, too, but she fell on him, stabbing him, a cry of rage and despair tearing from her lips. They fell together. Blood ran off the table to the floor, blood pooled from the man and woman lying together beside the table.

It all happened so fast that there had been no time for a cry of protest. But now I ran into the room, to give what help I could. The men were both dead; the woman was dying. If she saw me, she gave no sign. She bled from the wound in her breast, she bled from her mouth. She murmured, "Neil, Neil!" and died.

Behind me, Evelyn came to the threshold. I had forgotten her. She looked in and saw what I saw. I heard her scream, and got to her in time to catch her when she fainted. I carried her back to the car, some intuition guiding my steps. The whippoorwills cried from all sides, flying up silently, brushing past. Crying for somebody's soul, my grandmother used to say.

I got her to the car and put her in. I got in on the other side, hoping the car would start now. I knew what had to be done. There had been no telephone in that house, not even electricity. Logtown was closest, once I got back to the highway. I would have to report what I had seen.

The car started. I pulled forward a little, knowing there must be a driveway of some sort to the farm.

There was. It was used even less than the road, but I could turn there. The road was too narrow of itself, the shoulders too soft or too steep. I turned around and headed back. The light was still burning in that house.

Evelyn stirred.

"Take it easy," I said.

"God!" she said.

"Listen," I said. "We're all right."

"Were they all dead?"

"Uh-huh. All we can do is report it."

"How awful!"

"Sure," I said. "But things like that happen. It's our unlucky night."

She was silent for a little while. Then, "The whippoorwills!"

I noticed it the moment she spoke. Not a sound. Dead silence. Outside I knew the whippoorwills were calling, filling the night with their wild, nostalgic crying; but here in the car there was no sound.

"It's some quirk of space and sound," I said. "A pocket in space."

"What happened back there?"

I tried to explain things the way I had seen them, but somehow the whole thing now had an air of unreality, of dream; and the farther I got along that road, escaping the dark, wooded hollow, the less real it seemed. But what I had seen, I had seen; nothing could alter that. Evelyn said nothing.

We got back to the highway after what seemed an interminable ride. The car balked on the steep slope, just where the road was so steep that even the emergency and the regular brake could hardly hold it there; Evelyn had to push the accelerator in while I shifted and got started again. The highway never looked so good. Cars going back and forth between Green Spring and Logtown. I had the wild impulse to flag them down and tell them what had happened down in Lost Hope Valley.

I didn't. I drove into Logtown. I reported what I had seen to the village constable, who got on to the telephone and talked to the sheriff. I took Evelyn home and came back to help guide the deputy-sheriff who turned up at the sheriff's order, back to the scene of the crime.

I led the way back. There were three or four cars. It was about four miles from Logtown that the road had turned off into that precipitous descent into Lost Hope Valley. I knew the place, I thought, so well that I could lead someone there blindfolded.

But, try as I would, I could not find the turn. I could not find the road.

WHEN I stopped at the place where I thought it had been, there was a grassy shoulder. I got out and examined the ground by the glow of the headlights. It had the look of once having been a road, long ago. Certainly no one could travel it

now. And yet there were what looked like tire tracks over that grass, moving in the direction of the down-grade.

A road "that comes out only at night" indeed!

I felt like a dozen kinds of fool, and I was growing momentarily more frantic, lest we would not get there in time to do anything for any one of them just in case I should have been mistaken in thinking them all dead.

But the road was not to be found. I drove to Green Spring and back to Logtown, looking at every side-road. I found nothing. The men thought I had been drinking. I could understand how they would.

The deputy-sheriff was bound to make a report to the sheriff's office, just the same. I could imagine what would be in it. He took down everything I deposed in the most minute detail.

WE NEVER spoke of it. We never took strange roads at night after that.

One day I had a note from the sheriff asking me to pick up Evelyn and run up to the county seat and call on him. It was convenient to do so; the day he named was the day Evelyn and I had planned to go up for our license.

After we had it, we went over to the sheriff's office. He was a fat, good-natured man. I introduced Evelyn and myself.

"You're the folks had that funny thing happen to you that night last June," he said, identifying us. "I remember now I wrote you a letter. Got something here to show you."

He pulled open a drawer, talking as he did so. "Got to thinking. Says to myself there's something familiar about that story. And sure enough—but look at these."

There were three old photographs. Two men and a woman.

Evelyn's fingers tightened on my arm. She put her other hand over her lips, pressing down.

I nodded. "It's them."

Evelyn nodded, too.

"You'd have no call to think up a thing like that," the sheriff went on. "You can see for yourself how old the pictures are. Don't figure you'd know a thing about it. Now here's another photograph we took the other day."

The ruins of a house, a stone house. I recognized it, for all that not a wall was left intact.

"That's what you'll find in Lost Hope Valley today. How you got down that road, the Lord only knows. That's the Manadal farm. She got to fooling around with her husband's brother, and he shot 'em both. She got him with a knife before she died, though."

"That's it," I said. "I saw it."

"Yeah, that's it. Only it happened in 1891—sixty years ago. Maybe that's why nobody lives down in Lost Hope Valley now."

Something strange about remote country places, and the roads that lead into the pockets in the hills. We could understand, Evelyn and I, why that Lost Hope Valley road had been like a road "that just seems to come out at night."

The Devil of Maniara

BY

DOUGLAS LEACH

. . . down on his knees, talking to a crocodile.

PAPUA is a mighty strange country, mister. Things happen there that couldn't happen anywhere else in the world. Queer, spooky things. For instance, there was that affair up at Maniara that me and Doc Sewell run into. Yes sir, that business had even Doc scared, though the old hellion wouldn't admit it and claimed there wasn't nothing about it that couldn't be explained by natural causes and the working of coincidence.

The trouble was that when it was all over we had to report it, and we wasn't anyways crazy about getting mixed up in a tale of death and murder. The less me and Doc had to do with the Papuan police and the law, the happier we was, especially as our main line of business—Bird-of-Paradise hunting—was liable to get us a coupla years in Woodlark if we was caught. But when we told everything to Macrae, the Resident Magistrate at Sulaki, he just looked at us from under them shaggy eyebrows of his and nodded his head.

"You're two of the biggest liars between here and the Pelews," he says, "but this time I'm believing you. I knew the deceased, and I know something of the power of native sorcery, and no good can be served by raking up old bones. I shall have to make some sort of official inquiry of course, and your signed and sworn statement will be needed."

Well, we was lucky for once and never heard another word about it. Seemed almost as if Macrae was glad things had worked out like they had. Y'see it was like this:

THIS here Maniara plantation was on a tributary of the Purari, and it got its name from the native village of Maniara two or three miles away. A guy named Roger Dworn owned it. There had been three of 'em, a twin of Roger's, Simon, and a younger brother, Dave, but the twin had been killed in a shooting accident and Dave had cleared out and was living with the fathers of the Catholic Mission at Maui, on the Purari Delta. This one was a bit queer in the head by all accounts.

No one seemed to know much about Roger Dworn or his plantation, and there was odd tales that used to float around as to why he was living there at all. He was supposed to grow a little hemp and rubber, but not enough to make it pay. And Maniara wasn't no health resort, with the nearest white men at the Mission a hundred and fifty miles away, and almost at the back-door a bunch of savages whose main idea of a hot time was to go and get 'em a few heads. There was rumors of course. The favorite one was that he'd found gold, or maybe sapphires in the river gravel, and was keeping quiet about it, but there was darned few who'd risk time and dough to go and see for themselves.

One guy that we knew, Sam Glidden, took a chance and went on his own to see what he could find out, and just naturally vanished. The coast steamer that took him as far as the Delta had dropped him and his little outboard dinghy safe enough, and the Mission fathers had seen him passing Maui.

After that there was no news of him at all. Papua had just swallered him up. Most folks reckoned the natives had got him, although there was no traces of a white man's head in any of the villages when the police patrol called.

IT WAS about a year after Sam had disappeared, and when we was in Port Moresby outfitting our launch, the *Zara*, for a trip to Kikori, that Doc got bitten by the Maniara bug.

"It's not so very far out of our way," he says, "how about taking time off to pay the place a visit? Those yarns must have some sort of foundation, and it would be worth the risk. It'll be a gamble, but I've got an idea we may bump into something really good, Casaldy."

"Whenever you get a bright idea, about all we bump into is large slabs of grief," I snorts. "Ain't you *never* gonna grow outa believing in these kid stories of precious jewels?"

"There are other things besides jewels," he says.

He was staring out across the harbor with a sorta hungry far-away look in his hard little eyes, and I knew right away that if I didn't agree it meant the bust-up of our partnership. And for all he was such a two hundred and forty pounds of mean-tempered old hellion, somehow I kinda liked him. So in the end I give in.

As the Purari is a tricky waterway to navigate, with shifting mud-banks and bars, we made our first stop at Maui mission and went ashore to find out which arm of the delta would be the best to take.

Father O'Donnell, the mission head, took us into his bungalow, and after he'd drawn us a rough map he looked at us kinda thoughtful.

"If you'd take my advice—which you won't do, of course—you would keep away from Maniara," he says. "The place is evil."

Doc grinned. "Why, do you believe in this 'devil-devil' talk too?" he asks.

"Maybe I do," says the father, quiet like. "Not all devils wear horns and a tail, you know. And there are places in Papua where the very powers of darkness seem to flourish, and we can make no headway against them."

"That young brother of Roger Dworn's, he's here with you, isn't he?" asks Doc, after a while. "He should know if there's anything wrong up there. I'd like to have a chat with him."

"I'm sorry," says Father O'Donnell, "but he's just recovering from a severe attack of black-water, and he's in no state to have visitors. In any case, you wouldn't be able to get him to talk about Maniara."

He didn't tell us why, and it looked like he was wanting to change the subject, so finally, after thanking him, me and Doc pushed off.

FOR four days we puttered up that tea-green river with nothing to look at but jungle and water and screaming parakeets, and nothing to do but cuss the heat and the skeeters and each other. Then, before we come to Maniara, we turned into a quiet little stream and the country opened out a bit. It was sure a pretty part, mister. Tall nipa palms, and stretches of grass, green and smooth like lawns, running down to the water, and flowers of scarlet and blue and purple, and all so brilliant it 'ud make your eyes ache. Plumb tame and peaceful it looked.

Why, you could almost fancy you was back in the Botanical Gardens in Brisbane, and you wouldn't've been a bit surprised to turn a corner and see a cop, or fellers strolling along with their girls. But all the time you knew the water was full of alligators, and back in the bush, just a short walk away, Maniara village, full of frizzy-haired cannibals, where, as like as not, they were cutting up Auntie for the weekend roast. At last we rounded a bend, and there was a spidery jetty of logs sticking out into the stream.

"This must be it," says Doc.

There wasn't no one about, so we dropped anchor, sculled up to the jetty, tied up the dinghy and went ashore. We walked up a little pathway past a few acres of hemp that had been overgrown with weeds and creepers so red they blazed like fire. All of a sudden Doc stopped, listening.

"A pianner!" I mutters.

Yeah, it was someone playing a pianner, right up there back of anywhere, where it 'ud cost real money to freight in as much as a box of soda crackers.

"Wagner!" says Doc. "Tannhauser. By glory, that fellow can play!"

WE PASSED through a grove of trees, and there was an open space and back of it a house. It was a big house, built up on

piles, but it looked like it needed painting and patching up some.

A coupla tree-climbing wallabies was scampering about the roof, and as we got closer there broke out from behind somewhere the darndest barking and howling you ever heard. Must've been near half a dozen dogs there by the row they was making.

And right then I begun to get a cold feeling at my belly. I'd knocked around Papua so long I'd got so I could feel danger same as I could feel when anybody was staring at me from behind. And the guy that come walking out onto the verandah to see what was making the dogs bark didn't do nothing to make me feel easier.

He was dressed real smart, in clean ducks, and when he saw us he gave a little start. His face, which was dead white, seemed to freeze over. Then he got hold of himself, squeezed out a phony smile, and waved for us to come on up. But I was closer to him by now, looking up at him from the bottom of the steps, and there was something the matter with him.

I can't explain it, mister. I seen a lotta tough guys in my time. Hard-shell bozos that 'ud murder their own mother for fifty cents, and looked it. But this feller was different. There was something in his eyes, large and deep and black, that did something to you.

He was part of that queer place. All wrong, somehow.

"Good day," he says, calm and cool, as we stepped up. "I don't know who you are but I'm glad to see you anyway. Don't often get visitors. You'll have a drink?"

"You're Mr. Dworn, I take it?" asks Doc. "Roger Dworn?"

"You've heard of me?" says Dworn.

"Just—rumors," says Doc, and Dworn gave him a funny look.

Doc went on to pitch a smooth yarn about us being naturalists, making a study of bird and river-life.

"Ahh," murmurs Dworn. "Very interesting occupation, I'm sure." He looked us up and down, still smiling, and you could see he didn't believe a damn word of it.

In less to no time we was sitting out on the shady veranda digging into a swell feed of eggs, fish and fruit, with gin and lemon to lay the dust, and talking of this and that. Leastways, Doc and Dworn did the talking; most of it was way over my head. Science, music, the theory of reincarnation, religion—they gave 'em all a raking over. Especially reincarnation. Dworn seemed nuts about it, though it all sounded crazy to me and I pretty near went to sleep. Finally there come a bit of a hole in the conversation when both of 'em seemed to have run out of anything to say, and not wanting to sit there like a tongue-tied rube, I jumped into it with both feet.

"You keep a lotta dogs," I pipes up.

DWORN jumped. "Huh?" he grunts. "Oh, dogs? Yes, I'm very fond of dogs. Of all animals, in fact."

There was a white cockatoo fluttering round the veranda, and when he whistled to it it came and perched on his shoulder. The wallabies on the roof was tame too, and would come and eat out of his hand when he called 'em. He had a way with animals, sure enough. And with natives too. Man, how his Motu boy Kiwiri jumped when he spoke to him! Scared stiff that big kanaka was.

"I suppose you'll be wanting to move on first thing in the morning?" says Dworn at last.

"Well no," Doc says. "We were figuring on staying in this part for a week or two. There are some remarkable specimens of bird life around here. The trouble is that it's far from comfortable living on the launch this weather, and Casaldy here has to watch his health."

Now I've hardly ever been sick in my life, even if I am on the runty side, but I caught Doc's eye and kept quiet.

"We were wondering," he goes on, "if you'd be good enough to put us up for a while."

"Of course," says Dworn. "Stay as long as you like."

He couldn't very well say less, hospitality being almost a religion outback in Papua, but you could see he was wishing us both in hell.

He showed us into a back room where there was a coupla old iron beds, and we brung up our mattresses and dunnage from the launch and made ourselves comfortable.

AS WE was supposed to be studying the mysteries of nature it was only natural that we should want to do a lotta roaming around, and next day we went over Maniara plantation good and earnest. We didn't find nothing, though. What had been cultivated once was all overgrown and goin' back to jungle.

"Whatever it is that's keeping that guy here, it ain't gold," I says, kicking up the soft black loam. "Not enough in this whole district to fill your tooth. And it don't look like gem country, neither."

Doc grunted. Then, "Did you notice those dogs, Casaldy?" he jerks out. "Five of them, penned up like pigs. Native curs that he's probably got from the village. And you can't tell me he's keeping those flea-bitten mongrels just as pets!"

"What then?" I wants to know.

"Don't know," snaps Doc. "But I'm going to find out before I'm through!"

That night Dworn had a visitor. We wouldn't never have known only I happened to wake in the middle of the night and hear voices comin' from the next room. The wall between was just thin sago sheathing, and I managed to catch a word or two of Motu even though they was talking mighty quiet. I thought at first it was Kiwiri that was in there with Dworn, but it went on and on and I knew Dworn wasn't the kind of guy to spend half the night chinning with his house-boy, so I woke Doc and we both listened. At last we heard someone padding from the room, and then the rustle of the long grass behind the house. We was out of our beds and up at the long open window in time to see a tall, mop-headed savage slinking off. He was gone mighty quick, slidin' into the black of the bush silent as a shadder, but not before I seen the white clay markings on him, plain in the moonlight, and the two dried human hands slung around his neck by a string, and dangling down his back. And in the villages of the Gulf Division only one feller is allowed to wear hands.

"Cheest!" I gasps. "A sorcerer!"

"Quiet, you fool!" whispers Doc. "We don't want Dworn to hear us."

I done a lotta thinking after I crawled back to bed, for I'm here to tell you, mister, that native sorcery in Papua isn't something to frighten kids with; it's *real*. There's things them birds do that ain't never been properly explained. And because it usually ends in somebody gettin' bumped off, anyone practicing sorcery is liable to a stiff jail sentence.

WE TOOK it in turns to keep watch on Dworn at night after that. For two nights nothing happened, but on the third, way after midnight, we heard him get up and sneak out. We watched him go over to the dog pen, and pretty soon he came back leading one of them curs on a rope. He'd muzzled the dog so that it couldn't bark loud, but it was whining and tugging. Keeping well away from the house he headed off down towards the river, and in less than no time me and Doc had pulled on our pants and shoes and was trailing him. We stepped mighty soft and careful, with the guns that we always carried handy in our pockets, for Dworn wasn't the sort of bozo you could take risks with.

We lost track of him for a while, then we heard him call out something way out on our right. There was silence for a bit then a low whistle. We headed in that direction, but couldn't move fast count of the heavy jungle and having to keep quiet. Again comes that whistle, and all of a sudden there was a howling yelp from the dog, and silence. When we got closer we could hear Dworn talking and finally, by creeping up behind a bunch of wild sugarcane, we got so that we could see him.

And may I never move from this spot, but there he was down on his knees, talking to a crocodile! A tame one. Leastways, it was tame with *him*. You couldn't see its body, but only its long wicked head sticking out from among the reeds. And I'm telling you, mister, he was stroking it, rubbing his soft white hands up and down its snout and whispering to it like a feller stroking a purring cat.

The brute's jaws was wet and dripping, and there wasn't no dog any more. Gosh Almighty, but it was sure creepy, with the damp sour smell of the reeds, and the croak of the frogs, and the mist comin' off the river chill and ghostlike, and us standing there watching hardly daring to breathe.

It was easy to see, now, the reason for

those dogs. Crocs are crazy about dogmeat, and this devil Dworn had been feeding them poor curs to the brute like you'd coax a horse with lumps of sugar. And even a mangy, whining native dog is a dog all the same. The friend of man. Almost like murder it seemed.

Doc's fingers closed on my arm, tugging at me, and I followed him back the way we'd come. Y'see we didn't want Dworn to know we suspected anything, and we had to get back to the house before he did.

"That guy ain't human," I says, when we was back in our room. "Guess that black scut we saw with him the other night has been teaching him plenty. Whistlin' a croc up outa the river; making a pet of it! It's the damndest thing I ever seen."

"Nothing out of the ordinary in that," snorts Doc. "You can see the same trick any day in the Sydney Zoo. There's an alligator there so tame that they can do everything with it but give the kids rides on it! No, Casaldy, the interesting part about the whole affair is the fact that he was calling it by a particular name. Remember? Two or three minutes before the dog howled?"

"I heard him call out something, but I didn't catch what it was," I says. "I was too busy jungle-crawling."

"He was calling it 'Simon'," Doc says. "And Simon was his twin-brother's name. The brother that was killed, Casaldy!"

I SAW what he was driving at, and I don't know why, but I gave a little shiver. "Say, are you thinkin'——?" I begins, when Doc cuts me short.

"It's not what I think, but what Dworn apparently thinks," he says. "You heard him the other night? He's an ardent believer in reincarnation; imaginative, dipping into the mumbo-jumbo of native sorcery till it's affected his mind. He's reached the state where he believes that his dead brother has come back in the form of that crocodile."

"I'll be believing things myself if we stay in this damned place much longer," I tells him. "Let's clear out to-morrer!"

"What's the hurry?" Doc grunts. "We haven't learned anything worth knowing yet. In a day or two, maybe. All right, pipe down! Here's Dworn coming back."

A FUNNY thing happened next day. It was noon, and we was sculling out to the *Zara* to see that all was ship-shape, like we did occasionally, when there was a swishing sound out in the middle of the stream, and a lotta splashing and churning. It was two crocs havin' a fight, and as we watched, one of 'em beat it, chased by the other one. It ain't often you see these brutes scrapping, so we rowed after 'em, sorta interested. Every now and then the one that was being chased would turn and fight, and they'd snap and wrestle, and he'd break away again. But not for long. Man, but that poor reptile was taking a licking! There was a quiet little backwater, like a lagoon, some way downstream, and he hightailed it into there, cornered. We got in just in time to see the finish. The one that was winning was the biggest croc I ever seen, and as the smaller feller—though he wasn't by no means a runt, neither—waddled out onto the land, the big boy got him. They finished it there on the bank, tearing and snapping and clawing up the dirt. They was both streaming with blood, coughing and bellering. The loser was game, though he didn't stand a chance, and finally it ended with him stretched out deader'n a nit. The big feller waited to catch his breath, and then started to drag his misfortunate victim into the water.

"See that, Casaldy?" says Doc. "He's hauling him off to his larder. Watch now!"

Crocodiles usually have sorta caves dug out under the banks where they hide and keep their grub, and we tried to see where this one went. He come under water, quite close by us. All of a sudden Doc, leaning over and staring down, let a grunt outa him.

"Wait!" he says. "There's something lying on the bottom. A boat! Damn you, keep steady and don't make any ripples, I can't see properly. By God, Casaldy, it's an outboard motor-boat! Sam Glidden's for a million!"

I looked down too, and I wasn't botherin' about crocodiles no more. The water was deep and clear as glass, and with the sun shining down from straight overhead you could see clean to the bottom. But you know how it is when you're looking through water? The smallest movement, and every-

thing goes all twisted and shivery. The boat was there, but we had to wait till the water was real still before we could make out the details.

The stern was part buried by the weight of the motor, and the bow stuck up some. You could just see the hole gaping in the keel.

"Yeah, it's Sam's right enough," I says. "You c'n tell by them queer sorta outriggers he built onto it, so's it wouldn't capsize easy in a heavy sea. Well, what's the answer?"

Doc looked back across the bend of the river and the overgrown hemp plantation towards where you could just see the roof of the house, and his tough old mug set as hard as a chunk of lignite. "My hunch is murder," he says. "Dworn has always sworn he never saw anything of Sam at all, but that hole was made with an axe, Casaldy. You see, he'd have to get rid of the boat, it was incriminating evidence. And this was a good spot to scuttle her. Only by chance that we spotted it. Yes, I think the time has come for a showdown with Dworn." There was a rough, mean edge to his voice that meant somebody was goin' to catch hell. Maybe he was remembering the time Sam had got us out of a nasty jam with the police down at Samarai.

"We've only got a hunch to go on," he says. "We can't prove anything. We'll have to bluff, and get him to choke out the truth."

"Right now?" I asks.

"Well, we'll wait till this evening, after dinner," says Doc. "Remarkably fine meals he puts out here, for way back of everywhere."

DWORN was playing the pianner when we got back, but you could see he hadn't been in long by the earth stains on his white shoes when he stood up. He just looked at us with those snake eyes of his, nodded, grabbed his topee and went out, like he was getting plenty fed up at having us around. But that evening he give us a swell feed again.

After the meal was over and Kiwiri had cleared the dishes away, Doc got talking about gems and prospecting, and suddenly he says, "Glidden, Sam Glidden that disappeared on this river somewhere, about a year ago, he was after gems. Of course, you never saw anything of him, did you?"

Dworn didn't seem surprised nor startled, but his eyes glinted flat and wicked, like a shark's. "No," he says. "I never heard of him till the police came around making inquiries. Why?"

"Well, we located his boat to-day," says Doc, calm as you please. "Here on your plantation. At the bottom of that little lagoon downstream."

"Interesting, if true," comes back Dworn. "Are you satisfied it was *his* boat?"

"As satisfied as it's possible to be without absolute proof," says Doc. His voice was solemn and severe as a judge's and you could see he was getting a kick out of it all. For onct in his life he was on the side of the angels. "As satisfied as I am that you murdered Glidden," he says. His hand came out of his pocket, and his gun was in it. "Don't make any fuss or call that black of yours," he warns.

Dworn only laughed. He tilted his chair back till he was propped against the wall. "The most absurd accusation I ever heard," he says. "Why should I murder this fellow?"

"Because he found out too much, probably," says Doc.

"Found out?" snorts Dworn. "What was there to find?"

"Sorcery," says Doc. "It's a criminal offense, Dworn. As these black devils practice it, it means murder. Whenever they hold one of their meetings, or séances, or whatever you like to call them, somebody gets killed. God knows what bestial rites you must have taken part in from time to time. Yes, you've sunk pretty low. And that twin brother of yours that was shot—I wonder how much of an accident that was?"

That was sheer bluff, a wild shot of Doc's, but it went home, mister! Dworn's mouth twitched and his chair come down with a thump.

"That's enough!" he snarls. "You come here cadging meals and a bed, and repay me by making a lot of crazy accusations that you couldn't prove in a thousand years!" Then he got hold of himself, and calmed down again.

He smiled that thin smile of his. "I'll call your bluff," he says. "Just what are you going to do about it, anyway?"

"Do? We'll make your name stink from one end of the Territory to the other," says Doc. "We'll get you hounded out of here, you rat! We'll get the police after you, and this time you'll have some damned awkward questions to answer. You won't wriggle out of it—you'll——" He hesitates all of a sudden and his hand goes to his head. "Say, what—" he begins, slow and thick. But he don't get no further. His voice trails off, and his eyes get dazed and glassy, and he slumps forward with his head on the table, out to the world.

RIGHT then I began to feel muzzy myself, with a drumming in my ears, and I knew that white-faced smiling devil had doped our licker! I grabbed for my gun but I couldn't get my hand into my pocket. It wasn't only the doped *arrack,* mister. It was Dworn, staring at me and holding me with them black eyes of his. Staring, staring. It was like in a nightmare, when you're trying to run away from something and you can't move. Then everything got further and further away and I dropped right off.

I was still sitting on the chair when I come to, but I was tied hand and foot, same as Doc. My head was splitting, and by the way Doc was muttering and cussing he wasn't feeling no better. Dworn was smoking a cheroot and grinning at us.

"As clumsy a pair of inquisitive fools as I've ever seen," he says, pleasant and easy. "Y'know there's a lot in that kid saying about curiosity killing the cat. In your case at any rate I'm afraid it's going to prove fatal."

Doc looked at him long and steady. He had his nerve with him, that old hellion. Always did. "Yes, you'll do it, too," he says. "Murder doesn't mean anything to you. You'll kid us a bit, and jeer a bit, and then let us have it. We lose, that's all. But listen—you did kill Glidden, didn't you? No harm in telling us—now."

Dworn nodded. "Yes, I killed him. He was like you, prying into things he didn't—and never would—understand."

"And your brother Simon—how about him?" asks Doc.

Dworn stood up, mean and ugly, and for a minute I thought he was gonna swipe Doc acrosst the mouth. Mighty touchy he seemed about this here subject. Then he sorta subsided, though there was a funny look in his eyes.

"Why not?" he says, soft and slow, like he was talking to himself. "I've never told anyone before. It might help to get it out of my system." He looked out to where the moon was just coming up round and bright above the nipa palms. "There's plenty of time," he says, "and it'll help to keep you amused while you're waiting."

AND though I knew he meant what he said, and that he was gonna kill us right enough, I listened. Yeah, even though the fear of death was gripping my belly, I listened.

Cheest, I couldn't help it. He had a way of telling things so's you could almost see 'em happening right before your eyes. You could see them two brothers of his: Simon, his twin, that he was terrible fond of, and young Dave, big and sullen and mulish, that they both hated.

Their old man, one of the earliest settlers in the Territory, had left 'em Maniara and a little money besides. The plantation wasn't much, but they'd sorta fell in love with the beauty and the color of it all, and they stayed on there. Papua had "got" 'em, as she has many a man, mister. But the big feller, Dave, was always quarreling with 'em, and though they tried to freeze him out, they couldn't.

He had as much right there as them, and he stuck. Dworn didn't say what they quarreled about, but you could read between the lines. They'd took up with this sorcery till it had got hold of 'em like a drug, and Dave was dead against it, and didn't hold with 'em hobnobbing with the blacks and the rest of the truck. A queer family they must've been. A kink in 'em somewheres. Anyways, Roger finally decided to kill Dave. He admitted it, telling us there like it was the most natural thing in the world.

"The three of us occasionally went out together shooting wild pig, and I determined to seize my opportunity," he says. "I didn't tell Simon what I meant to do. He was too highly-strung and imaginative. He might have regretted it afterwards. I planned to make it look like an accident. But something

went wrong. I don't know even now just how it happened. We were spread out in a fan shape, creeping forward through thick bush, and in some way Simon must have come over from the right whilst Dave edged out. Anyway, I saw a shape that I could have sworn was Dave's moving through a tangle of scarlet creeper. I remember I wasn't a bit excited, and I took aim as cold and steady as a rock, and fired. But when I got there it was Simon that was lying crumpled among the blossoms. He was quite dead, and the shock of it numbed me. If it hadn't been for that I think I'd have gone out of my mind. My God, can't you see the terrible irony of it! Simon! And I'd killed him."

When he was telling us this part, Dworn wasn't calm no more. Them mad black eyes of his was blazing, and he kept opening and shutting his hands.

"Then Dave came rushing up," he goes on, "and though I swore it was an accident, he knew the truth. He didn't put it into words, but I could see he knew by the fear that sprung into his eyes. He'd never been frightened of me before. I hated him more than ever, and if I had shot him down as he stood there, gasping and sweating, no one would ever have known, but I'd lost my nerve.

"And next morning our little launch was gone and he had disappeared. He's been at the Maui Mission ever since, and though I've often expected him to come back or to make trouble for me, he never has. You see he couldn't prove anything, and he always hated scandal of any kind. I don't know whether he's turned religious or not, but he spends his time in mission work I believe. . . . Well, now you know."

THAT was the end of the story, and Dworn shouted for Kiwiri, who comes padding in. Dworn handed him a lotta Motu talk that I couldn't savvy, and the big guy grabbed hold of Doc under the armpits and hauled him outa his chair. Doc struggled and swore like a maniac, but he couldn't do much, tied like he was, and Kiwiri, who was strong as a bull, drug him out onto the veranda. I heard Doc's feet bumping and dragging down the steps, and there I was, left alone with Dworn. But Dworn didn't pay no attention to me. He just went up to the pianner and started to play.

It was all crazy, like in a dream, but I begun working my wrists, trying to wriggle 'em loose. It ain't so easy as you might think to tie a guy's hands and I could feel the rope giving a little. But it was slow work, and I knew it 'ud be quite a while before I could get 'em free. And that 'ud only be the half of it. There'd still be Dworn and Kiwiri.

After a while Kiwiri come back and snaked me out same as he had Doc, only this time Dworn come with us. Down acrosst the hemp field we went, towards the river, till we come out onto the bank by the sugar-cane where we'd watched Dworn talking to the crocodile. I knew what was gonna happen then, and all I could think of was the awful howl that the dog had give when the croc had got him, and I felt more scared than I'd ever felt before, or have since. The palms of my hands got wet and little fever shivers run down my spine. Doc was right near me, hunched up on the ground with a rope running from his tied hands to the bottom of a tree, like the way they tether goats out for bait when they're hunting tigers up in Sumatra. They treated me the same, and then Dworn chased Kiwiri out of it. And it certainly looked like that scared savage was only too pleased to get outa the way.

AND now Dworn begun to whistle and call, same as he had that other night. Man, I c'n see him yet. Standing there slim and dark peering out to where the river was running black as spilled ink, and whistling like a feller whistling for a dog that's out hunting rats and won't come home. I felt I wanted to laugh, somehow. Hysterics, I guess.

It seemed a long, long time, but at last there was a rippling swish, and the drag and scuffle of something lumbering through the reeds. Finally I saw a croc heaving itself outa the water, dim and ghostly, with the moon shining on its wet scales and its claws sinking a little in the mud. Closer it come, and closer, till I could see the size of it. And it was the same brute that we'd watched kill the other one only that noon. There wasn't no mistaking it. There was the raw cuts and scars where it had been chewed up some, and

you'd only see a croc as big as that once in a lifetime, anyway.

Dworn, who'd bent down and was clucking to it, saw it too, and he jerked up suddenly and stepped back. I saw his face plain in the moonlight. It was twisted and wet with terror, all white and shiny like the belly of a dead fish.

"No," he says in a husky whisper. "It's not Simon! It's not—" and then his jaw dropped and he let a shriek outa him. "Dave!" he screams. "Oh my God, it's Dave!" and he turns to run.

Doc wouldn't talk about it afterwards, and I never knew whether he done it on purpose or whether it was a accident, but his legs were stuck out and tripped Dworn up. And the next second the brute had him. Dworn I mean.

I'm tough, but I shut my eyes. There was one more scream from Dworn, and a horrible snarling, worrying sound, and a splashing and threshing among the reeds. When I opened my eyes there wasn't nothing but a trail of blood through the broken reeds and a ripple on the water where something had disappeared. I was so rattled and shaky that, though my hands was already half loose, it took most an hour before I'd wriggled right free and untied Doc.

Mister, you c'n bet we didn't stay there at Maniara longer than it took us to go back to the house, grab us our few things, and get the *Zara* away. If Kiwiri was around and seen us, he never showed up anyway. Dead scared he must've been.

Three, four days later we called in at Maui again to let young Dave Dworn know what had happened to his brother. Seemed like it was our duty. And right then we got a shock.

We found that David Dworn, who'd been recovering from a bout of blackwater when we was on our way up, had had a relapse and died quiet recent.

"When was it?" asks Doc, who'd gone a bit pale.

"Last Monday at noon," Father O'Donnell tells us.

"And what's today?" I wants to know.

"Friday," says the father. "Why?"

But I was busy doin' some figuring on my fingers. "Sheest!" I says, "Monday noon was when we saw them crocodiles fighting. My God, Doc, supposing there is something in what Dworn thought, after all? You know, reincarnation? Supposing that the croc that was killed was Simon, and the other one——"

"Don't be a damn fool, Casaldy!" snaps Doc. "Dworn was a madman, and you know it. It's coincidence, that's all. Coincidence."

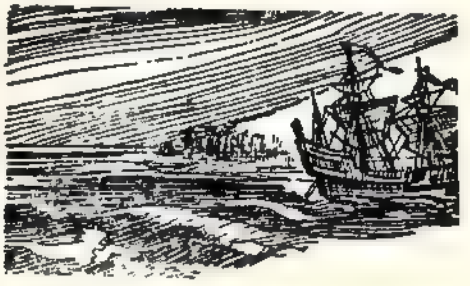
But, like I said before, coincidence or no coincidence, we'd seen enough to make us very careful about any sort of magic. Not that we believed it of course, but . . .

Ghost Port

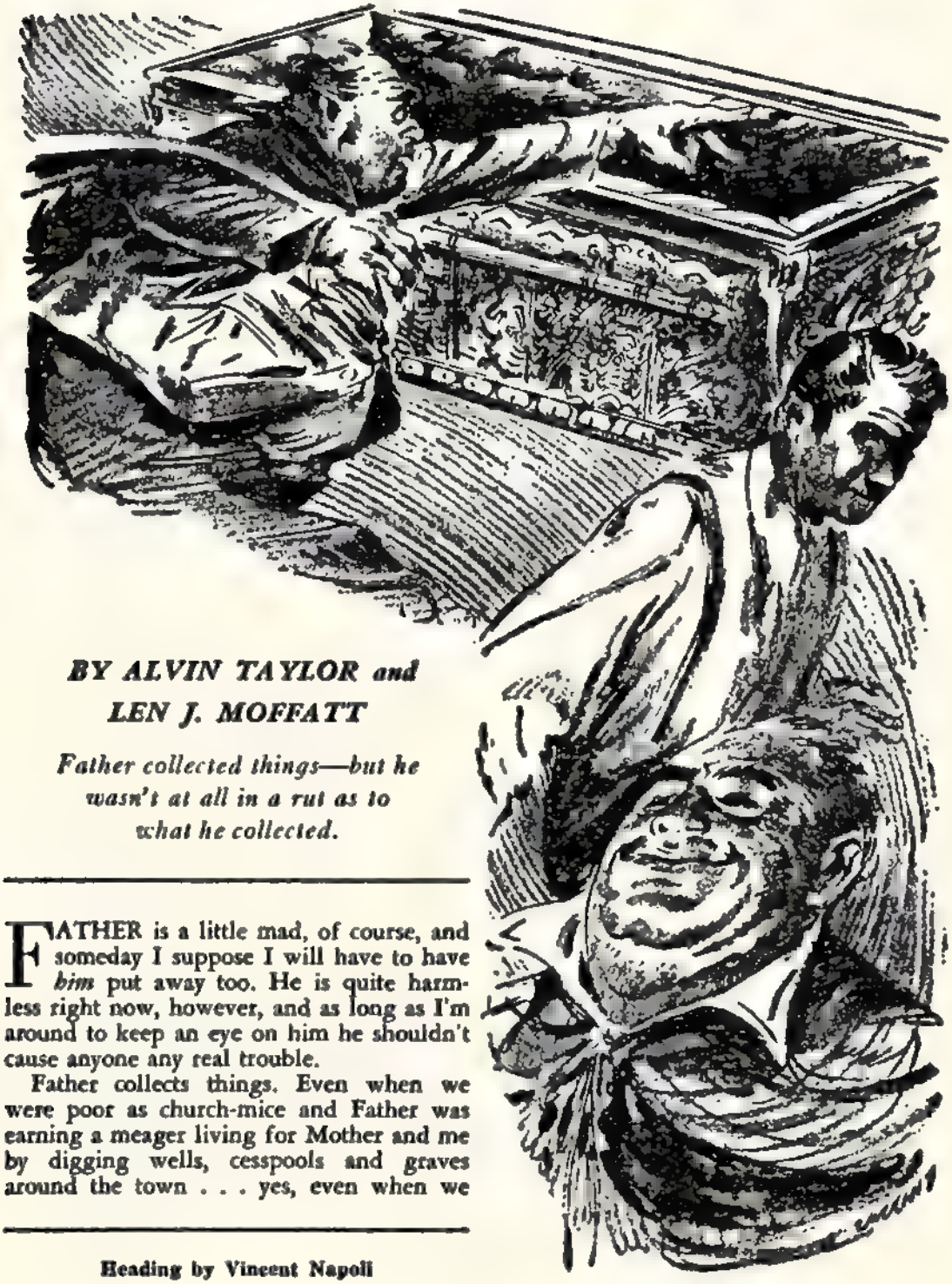
By PAULINE BOOKER

THERE is a port of endless night,
Where cold and treacherous waters flow,
And over bleak, fog-shrouded reefs,
The tempest-winds eternally blow.

A port where Time itself is dead,
And not a living voice can sound;
For only ships set sail from here
With souls forever outward bound.



Father's Vampire



BY ALVIN TAYLOR and LEN J. MOFFATT

Father collected things—but he wasn't at all in a rut as to what he collected.

FATHER is a little mad, of course, and someday I suppose I will have to have *him* put away too. He is quite harmless right now, however, and as long as I'm around to keep an eye on him he shouldn't cause anyone any real trouble.

Father collects things. Even when we were poor as church-mice and Father was earning a meager living for Mother and me by digging wells, cesspools and graves around the town . . . yes, even when we

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Heading by Vincent Napoli

were on relief during the depression years Father collected things.

One thing about Father, though. He wasn't in a rut like many collectors are. He didn't specialize in any one thing. He would bring home odds and ends, old books, torn halves of magazines, bits of string and rope, used ice cream sticks, pieces of metal from worn-out machines and so on.

And, of course, after we became fabulously wealthy there seemed to be no end to Father's collecting. We became wealthy when Uncle Henry died. Uncle Henry was Father's brother who struck it rich in Texas or some such God-forsaken place and for some reason or other (we were never on very friendly terms with Uncle Henry) he willed us his vast fortune. It was a little disconcerting because we weren't used to having all that money and we didn't quite know what to do with it. It was then that Father went a little mad.

Oh, he was practical enough at first. We had the old house done over and he bought Mother a pretty new cotton dress and gave me a ten-dollar bill to do with just whatever I pleased. I gave some of it to Mother to buy groceries with and am afraid I spent the rest of it rather foolishly on a girl.

Then Aunt Mabel came to live with us. She was Uncle Henry's widow. The lawyer who came with her (he didn't stay very long although Mother was polite enough when she invited him to stay for supper) said we had inherited the money all right but there was a provision in the will which said we must look after Aunt Mabel until she died if we wanted to *keep* the money.

Mother said, "I knew there was a catch to it, but of course, Mabel is welcome here anytime."

Father said, "I always did dislike you less than I did Henry, Mabel." He gave me a look which meant I was supposed to say something nice to Aunt Mabel so I told her she could have one of my pet rats. Not the pregnant one, however, as I wanted the little rats from it to use in my home laboratory experiments.

Aunt Mabel didn't seem too happy with us at first but I think she got used to our dull, normal way of living after a while. I suppose she was used to a more adventurous *life* in Texas and just didn't feel at home with us right away. Anyway she didn't have to live with us very long because we found her dead in bed one morning.

Father sent for a doctor right away. As I said he can be practical when he wants to be and he knew a doctor would have to pronounce her dead, make out a certificate, and so on. The doctor called in the constable and some other authorities because he said Aunt Mabel had been murdered.

This made Mother hysterical. She began to scream that she didn't do it and no one could prove she did it. But the constable claimed that the tiny pricks in Aunt Mabel's throat were caused by Mother's hatpin and the doctor said there was hardly a drop of blood in Aunt Mabel's body.

They were a little put out though because there was no blood on the bedclothes or anywhere in the room. They searched the entire house and grounds, but they couldn't find Aunt Mabel's blood anywhere.

So Father signed the papers and had Mother put away in the asylum just up the road from here. We buried Aunt Mabel in the old churchyard. We asked Reverend Worthy in to say a few words over her as Aunt Mabel had been a religious woman, always quoting the Bible or a bit now and then from the Decameron of Boccaccio.

IT WAS several days after the funeral when Father called me into his study and gave me his best chair to sit in. He perched his lank frame on the edge of a table and smiled knowingly. I smiled knowingly back at him. I know how to humor Father.

"Being a bright and intelligent young man you no doubt have some idea concerning what I am about to reveal," said Father.

I kept on smiling.

"Of course," he said. "Your own Father's son. Well you realize then that it wasn't your Mother who killed poor dear Mabel."

"Oh?" I said quietly.

"Of course not," said Father. "It was the vampire I am keeping in the cellar. I couldn't very well tell the authorities I had collected a vampire, coffin and all, now could I? Your mother knew about it, naturally. It was always hard to keep secrets from her. But then that is the way it is with people who are a little—er—demented? I'm

afraid the strain of Mabel's demise was just too much for your poor Mother, so it is just as well that she is where she is and that things have turned out so nicely without me having to give up my vampire. . . ."

I was fascinated. Vampires have always fascinated me. I couldn't control my eagerness as I questioned Father.

"What does it look like? Is it in the form of a man or woman or what? Is it thin or fat? Does . . ."

Father raised a thin hand to ward off my questions.

"Please, son," he smiled. "One thing at a time. I really couldn't tell you about the nature of the vampire as I haven't seen it yet."

"You haven't? Then how do you know it killed Aunt Mabel?"

"The markings on her throat and the fact that we could not find the blood she obviously lost," said Father, impatiently. "Why it was so obvious that I was sorely afraid the authorities would suspect the presence of a vampire. They did not, however, or perhaps they assumed that your mother had gotten rid of the blood in some other way or drunk it herself. Authorities being what they are—politicians—are generally a stupid lot. Clever at times, but always stupid."

"If you really have a vampire, Father, I want to see it. I must see it!"

"Whatever for? They are dangerous, you know. I just collected this one for the curiosity of having one about. Besides it doesn't seem to get out of its coffin, lazy fellow that it is. Except for its escapade with Mabel. It is probably a very old vampire who prefers to sleep most of the time and needs little nourishment. Just as well though, as I considered inviting tramps and other such riff-raff in to supper now and then so it would not starve and thus not give *us* any trouble. One must be practical, you know."

"Of course," I agreed. "But I really do want to see it and talk with it. I have always wanted to interview a vampire. I could write it up for the local paper and then maybe Editor Stanley would put me on his staff."

"Why on earth do you want to write for that two-bit rag?" frowned Father. "And if you did write such an interview you would have to present it as fiction and use a pseudonym. I don't want notoriety, you know. I want to be alone with my collection."

Father was beginning to weep. I handed him my handkerchief and tried to change the subject. One of Father's pet peeves is the town's weekly paper which stirred up such a fuss when we inherited the money. Such inaccurate reporting! If Stanley had let me write it up as I wanted to and offered to but . . .

"Look, Father," I said. "Please let me visit the vampire. I'll be very polite and I'll write the interview for some other publication. One of the 'little magazines', perhaps. They don't pay much but they are awfully literary. Lord knows we don't need the money."

"Well," said Father, managing a weak smile. "I guess it will be all right. I doubt if you will get to see it, though. I admit I was a little curious when the coffin arrived. I even tapped on the box and asked it to come out but nothing happened at all. I tried to lift the lid but it is evidently locked or bolted from the inside. Very clever vampire. The coffin is made of wood which must be six inches thick. I thought once of prying it open, forcing the lock or bolt or whatever it is but I was afraid of ruining the coffin itself. It's a wonderful piece of woodcarving. I know there is a vampire in there all right because I have the papers that go with the box—a kind of written guarantee. And then, of course, there was Mabel. . . ."

I waited impatiently for Father to dismiss me. He had given his permission and there was nothing on earth I wanted more to see than a real undead vampire. I thought of all the questions I could ask and of other things, too, for I must admit I have peeked into some of Father's old books when he wasn't around. . . .

Finally Father let me go with a parting warning to be very careful, and above all, to be polite. I thanked him heartily and left him playing with his collection of hand-painted cockroaches. He painted them himself—all the colors of the rainbow. Father really has the soul of an artist.

* * * * *

AS I DESCENDED the cellar steps I thought I heard a bumping noise but wasn't sure where it was coming from. I was carrying a flashlight, my notebook and

ballpoint pen and two cold cans of beer. I had thought of wearing some garlic or a crucifix but decided that wouldn't be very polite though it struck me as humorous at the time. I knew the vampire wouldn't hurt me any. I have made a study of vampires and although I hate to appear immodest I believe I probably know more about them than any other being in the world. Even more than Father because I know he hasn't read all of his books.

The coffin was indeed beautiful, obviously hand-carved. It was covered with engravings depicting all sorts of fascinating rites as well as scenes from the private lives of famous beauties of history. There were also some very patriotic scenes showing the battle of Bunker Hill, the Spanish-American War and so on with a likeness of George Washington in bas-relief smiling down upon it all.

I knocked quietly on the coffin lid. There was a noise inside.

"Maybe just an echo," I thought, but I knocked again—harder.

"Oh, go away and let me sleep!" said a voice from inside the coffin.

"You're there!" I shouted with joy. "You're really there! A real true vampire at last! Please come out and talk to me."

"Why should I?" muttered the voice, definitely masculine.

I decided to fib a bit. It seemed the only way to get it out of its coffin.

"I've heard a lot about you, Mr. Vampire. I understand you have lived a fascinating life and that when you died your life after death—if I may call it that—was even more fabulous. But I would like to hear the details from your own lips. I'm sure you are a genius at story telling and can thrill me with tales of the places you have been, the women you have known, the people you have dined with and dined on. . . ."

I could hear it moving about inside its coffin."

"Naturally," came the voice. "But why do you want to know?"

"I have always been fond of vampires and vampire stories," I replied promptly. "But most of the stories were silly fiction and I want to hear the truth from a real vampire. I want my facts from an authority. In short, I want to interview you. I can

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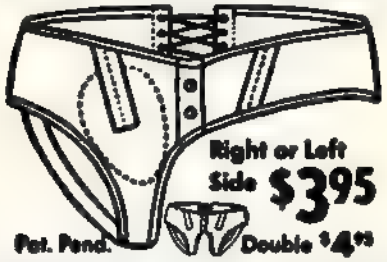

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promise you a very nice write-up in all of the Sunday papers. If you wish, I'll use a pseudonym and will not reveal your location so no one will come around and bother you. . . ."

I heard a clicking sound inside the coffin and then the lid raised up. The vampire, in the form of a fat, healthy-looking man, climbed out, stretched and yawned.

"So you want the story of my life and undeath," it grinned, showing white, pointed teeth. "Aren't you afraid I'll attack you?"

"Why should I be afraid?" I smiled, ever so innocently. "You belong to my father and besides you have recently dined on Aunt Mabel who must have had enough blood to satisfy you for weeks to come."

"Perhaps," said the vampire, sitting down on the coffin's edge beside me. "You look like an interesting morsel though . . ."

"Oh, skip that nonsense," I said. "Let's get to your history. Now, first give me the basic facts, statistics, you know. Birthdate. Where born? And so on up to time of death, cause of same and the like. You just talk away and I'll take it down in shorthand. . . ."

"Very well," it said, trying to keep its eyes away from my neck. They were rather nice blue eyes, though. "I was born on April 9, 1652 . . ."

It began to give a very boring account of its life in a small Hungarian village going into some detail regarding its various conquests of girls and the amount of wine it could consume in one evening. But I patiently took it all down. While it talked it kept gazing at me as though hypnotized and when it began to drool I moved away a little.

It must have noticed my moving for it immediately stopped talking and edged closer to me.

"Do not sit so far away," it whispered, placing a cold hand on my shoulder.

"Please continue your story," I said as quietly as possible.

"Another time," murmured the vampire. "You can best enjoy it when you become one of us. Your poor aunt is having the devil's own time trying to get out of that churchyard, but perhaps you will be more fortunate. In fact, I will take the trouble to instruct your father to let your coffin rest

here with mine. We can be death-long companions. But first you must let me . . ."

His face was close to mine now and I could feel his cold breath on my throat. This wouldn't have been so bad but he had a bad case of halitosis. I stood up and stepped away from him, fingering the flashlight and letting the notebook and pen drop to the floor. It arose and moved towards me.

"The light will not help you," it smiled. "It won't hurt much, really. Just a little nip, a little pressure and you will be dead and I will be fed. Then you will evolve into undeadness and join me forever. . . ."

"Not interested, really," I said, insistently enough.

"But why not? You said you have always been fascinated by vampires. Why not become one? It is so easy and so much fun after all. . . ."

"I am not going to be a vampire," I told it firmly. "I have a definite interest in them but I would never think of being one, believe me. I'm happy the way I am."

"Please do not be difficult," said the vampire. It was close to me now and I could feel the wall behind me. Somehow it had got between me and the stairs. "If I want to I can force you into submission. I am stronger than a mere mortal man, you know."

I smiled right into its leering face.

"You may as well know," I said. "It is impossible for me to become a vampire. The most powerful vampire in existence cannot harm me. I know."

The vampire began to look a little unsure of itself. But it managed a grin combined with a sneer.

"And why can't you become a vampire? All I have to do is attack you, drink your blood . . ."

"You just can't do it," I said. "Perhaps you're not as bright as I thought. But surely all vampires know about *druds* and have learned to fear them."

The vampire shuddered.

"*Druds!* There are no *druds* here. *Druds* are rare; perhaps one is born every few centuries, but . . ."

"I'm a *drud*," I said. "I found out by reading one of Father's old books. Even Father doesn't know about me or about *druds*, for that matter, as he doesn't read

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half the stuff he collects. I might never have known if I hadn't read that book. Or perhaps I would have learned about myself naturally once I met you or some other vampire. I know I have often felt the hunger, the thirst but I always tried to satisfy it with a sandwich or a glass of beer. I assumed it was an unusual hunger but I hate to bother with doctors and as I appeared to be quite healthy otherwise . . ."

THE vampire was leering again.

"You are not a *drud,*" it said. "You may have read about the accursed creatures in some old book but you couldn't be a *drud*. A *drud* is a vampire's vampire. It drinks the blood of vampires after the vampire has dined on some mortal being. *Druds* have the disgusting taste for distilled blood . . . the blood of my kind after we have taken it from some human. But you are not a *drud* and now I shall have your life!"

I ducked just in time to avoid its grabbing arms and clicking teeth.

"I am too a *drud!*" I shouted. "What makes you think I'm not? You better look out or *I'll* have *your* blood. I'm awfully thirsty, you know. I didn't come down here just to get a story from you. That was just to get you out of your coffin so I could get at you!"

"You cannot be a *drud,*" grinned the vampire, closing in again. "You have eyebrows. *Druds* do not have eyebrows!"

"Of course, they haven't," I said, reaching up and pulling off the fake eyebrows I had been wearing. I advanced on the vampire.

It screamed horribly, I'm sure, and ran from me to its coffin. I raced madly after it but stumbled over an empty beer can. By the time I got to my feet the vampire was in its coffin and I could hear the lock clicking on the inside.

"You can't reach me now!" It cried. "You'll never get me! I'll stay here forever! You can't reach me now!"

I hammered heavily on the coffin lid and could hear it weeping hysterically inside. Finally, I picked up my notes and pen and found my way to the stairs. As I climbed up into the house I smiled and thought that I really hadn't gotten much of a story for all my trouble. Shaving off my eyebrows had

been a nuisance but, oh well, they will grow back in a little while.

Father is peeved at me for frightening the vampire so that it won't come out of its coffin, but he'll get over it eventually. Of course, we'll have to find some other use for the hobo Father invited in to supper tonight.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I picked up the March issue of WEIRD TALES *and was immediately pleased by the wonderful cover on it. However, after perusing the contents I was even more delighted. It was with immense pleasure and gratification that I read, "The Horror at Red Hook." Since it was written by Lovecraft no further comment is needed. August Derleth deviating somewhat from his usual gamut of elder gods and such sundry beings came up with a delightful little yarn, "The Place of Desolation." "The Mask" by Casewit was nicely done with a clever ending, however, I think plaudits should go to the inimitable Seabury Quinn having deserted De Grandin and Trowbridge and penned a rather unique tale, "The Scarred Soul." These coupled with a few excellent other stories and rounded out by two remarkable poems made for a terrific issue.*

May I add my voice to your commending Mr. Joseph Eberle not only for a fine cover but for some superlative art work for C. A. Smith's poem? This is the caliber of magazine that we fans are seeking. Keep them

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The Editor, WEIRD TALES
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Having read what all the others have had to say to date, I felt I must add a few humble remarks of my own. How comforting it must be for an Editor to know that there is no rival to WEIRD TALES *in existence. We are all agreed on that!*

But surely you could bring it out monthly if you encouraged the members of the W. T. C. who could write to add their experiences from all parts of the world. Who knows what latent talent lies hidden? You could reward those outstanding with a year's free subscription to W. T. and we would all have nothing to lose and perhaps a great deal to gain.

With all the very best of good wishes for 1952, although the dear old Margaret Brundage covers are no more, alas!

B. Leslie Perrett
Southampton, England.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Just a very brief note to let you know how much I enjoyed seeing H. P. Lovecraft's "Horror at Red Hook" in print again. I am sure many of your older readers were glad to read it again, and you have given the younger generation a new world to explore. I should imagine you would find it feasible to reprint many more of his tales due to the fact they are essentially timeless, and in only a few instances does their style or allusions to current events date them.

Thank you very much.

J. T. Crackel,
Indianapolis, Ind.

Lovecraft et Al

And so the above letter brings us to our suggestion—in the last issue—that the fans undertake to enlighten our younger readers about the Lovecraft legend. We knew we should be in for a flood of correspondence;

we were; we are grateful. Our own suggestion to young reader Paulive is that he read August Derleth's H. P. L.: A Memoir, published by Arkham House. From there on we'll let our readers take it:

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

The letter by Robert Paulive certainly calls for an answer in the pages of WEIRD TALES, *so here is my contribution to same. I have been reading Lovecraft's stories ever since I discovered a book of them eight years ago, when I was ten years old; he is my favorite author, and the wonderful mythology he created is my favorite subject matter in a fantasy story.*

The Lovecraft or Cthulhu Mythos is a series of stories by Lovecraft and several of his fellow-writers, having a similar background and based on a pantheon of Elder Gods and demons created by Lovecraft. August Derleth, in his biography of HPL, says that the Cthulhu Mythos was in turn based on varied characters, places, and situations from several stories of early writers—Ambrose Bierce, Poe, Arthur Machen, and Robert W. Chambers. Lovecraft created the "Necronomicon" of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, and included passages and fragments of it in many of the stories of the series; he also wrote of the shadow-haunted and cursed towns of Arkham and Innsmouth, where much of the action of the Mythos takes place, and of the hidden places of the earth where ancient evil waits, watchful and ready to spring forth upon the world—Irem, the City of Pillars; R'lyeh, where dead Cthulhu lies sleeping; Ya-N'thlei; and the hidden Plateau of Leng. Robert E. Briney, Wilmette, Ill. . . . *H. P. Lovecraft was born in 1890. He was early attracted to books (he wrote practically all his life); some people claim he read every book in his grandfather's huge library, and remembered everything in it.*

Early in his writing career he started writing weird tales; first he imitated the style of Lord Dunsany and then started developing his own oft-imitated style. This style describes the mysterious and terrible actions of the gods which Lovecraft names the Old Ones. Some of the most important of these

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Old Ones are Cthulhu, high-priest of the gods; Azathoth, shapeless Ruler of the Universe; Nyarlathotep, messenger of the gods, and many others. The "Necronomicon," by the "mad Arab Abdul Alhazred," together with other books, figures importantly in the Lovecraft circle lore. The general atmosphere of Lovecraft in his stories is one of morbid preoccupation with the thought of nearing doom; but hints are made of a great obscene rejoicing to come when the gods wake from their timeless sleep beneath the seas and become as powerful as they ever were. The Cthulhu cult meets to pray for the coming of this rising of the gods. Naturally, none of these cults or books or gods ever existed (I hope!) but Lovecraft describes them vividly indeed.

Lovecraft died in Providence, his home town, in 1937, in his forty-seventh year. Writers of the Lovecraft group still carry on his tradition and make his memory and his writings known the world over. Steven Nickman, Ventnor, N. J. . . . *In regards to Mr. Paulive's query in the March, '52, issue of WT: The volume known as the "Necronomicon" is, alas, the fertile creation of the late and without a doubt, great master of horror fiction, H. P. Lovecraft. The Cthulhu Mythos is a great part of his imaginative conception of a hideous world of "might-have-been." As are the fabulous towns of Arkham, Dunwitch, Kingsport, and dreaded Innsmouth.*

Perhaps it should be explained that Lovecraft wrote two distinct types of fantasy: the regional and grimly realistic tales of cosmic horror, typified by such tales as "The Dunwitch Horror" and "The Shadow Out of Time"; the other type were his "Dunsian" pieces like "The Cats of Ulthar" and the short novel, "Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath." Leif Arjen, Rockford, Ill. . . . *The chronology of Lovecraft's "Necronomicon" was so convincing that many a book dealer has been called on to supply a copy! Lovecraft also created as supplements to his Necronomicon the "R'ley Text; the Book of Dzyan, and many more.* John Gatto, Uniontown, Pennsylvania. . . . *Although the characters, books, places, incidents, names, etc., etc., that are used in the Cthulhu stories are fictional it is interesting to observe that both Bob Michael of the Werewolf Bookshop*

and book agent Philip C. Duschnes have at one time or another advertised as having for sale copies of the "Necronomicon"—Mr. Michael's edition was priced at $999,999.00 (that's right—nine hundred ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine dollars) while Mr. Duschnes wanted only $375 for his copy. In the face of such contradictory evidence I can only refer Mr. Paulive to any competent and comprehensive biography of Howard Phillips Lovecraft—and let him make his own decision! Irving Glassman, Brooklyn, N. Y.

We have a further long letter from a reader who tells of his experience when he actually handled the "Necronomicon." This we hope to print in our next issue.—Editor WEIRD TALES.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Since the beginning of time man has had religions of sorts, and all of these religions have gravitated around the central core of the unknown. Religion and philosophy are not only relative, but synonymous. I believe that most of us enjoy tales of the weird, fantastic, and bizarre, but the stories of personal import are the ones that delve into the so far "unanswerable question."

It is a wise author who realizes that since the beginning, man has and will continue to seek the Truth. *Dan Harvey,*
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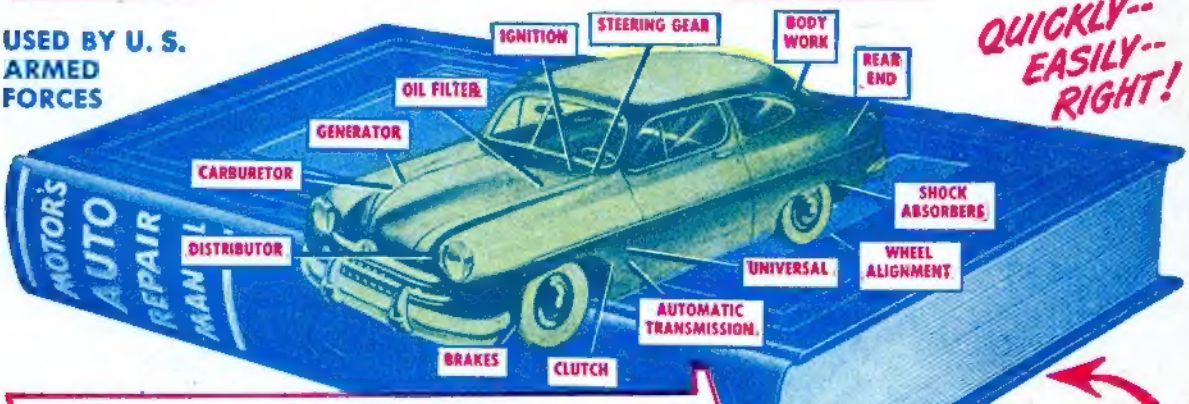

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